

THE
YOUNGER SISTER.

V O L. I.



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T H E

YOUNGER SISTER



L O N D O N :

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HISTORY OF
THE
YOUNGER SISTER:

OF
HISTORY

OF
Miss SOMERSET.

LETTER I.

Miss SOMERSET to Miss KNIGHTLY.

Marlborough.

HOW will my amiable friend be surprised at receiving a letter dated from this place! Yet let me entreat my lovely girl not to suffer her tender heart to be too much affected at hearing of the sudden and unexpected distress, which at this time surrounds her unhappy Meliora.

VOL. I. B You

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You are no stranger to the real reluctance I felt when I was hurried from you so precipitately, the last time I was permitted to visit Knightly-Court.----How did my throbbing bosom then beat at every parting step!---How frequently did I turn my wandering eyes, and fix them on that spot where I had experienced so much felicity!--till at last, by a few paces, I lost sight of the pleasing prospect, and with it, O how shall I write the dire distress! ended all my happiness; nor do I believe there is a wretch now existing more miserable than myself.

You know I was sent for to attend the nuptials of my sister, and, tho' not a match agreeable to my sentiments, I thought, as I was some years younger, I had no right to dispute *her* choice; full of these reflections, I found myself at Herbert-Hall, whilst my whole heart remained at Knightly-Court.

As I entered the avenue, I observed a servant in great confusion coming towards me; I failed not to enquire eagerly for my sister, when he replied, with an unmannerly look, she was from home. ---Surprised at so unexpected an answer, and vexed at not finding her with open arms to receive me, I ventured to enter the hall; when Jenny came running, half out of breath, with the deepest distress in her looks---that I almost dreaded to enquire the cause, when she spared me the trouble, by telling me my sister was gone to Lord Easy's, in the greatest disorder imaginable; owing to an account she had lately heard of Mr. Padstow's renewing his addresses to me whilst at Knightly-Court.---Struck with amazement, I let her proceed, without once endeavouring to interrupt her: And now, Madam, continued she, with the utmost grief do I speak it, you are immediately to accept of Mr. Foxchase as a husband, or be carried directly to your

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aunt Montague's, at M-----Castle; the chaise is now ready, therefore you must instantly determine, as my Lady positively declares she will not enter these walls, till you have made choice of one or the other; but, added she, should you prefer Mr. Foxchase, she will immediately repair home, and study to promote your felicity.

What, my dear Lavinia, could I do in this dreadful situation? You well know the great aversion I have ever taken to Mr. Foxchase; nor could I now think of accepting that man for my husband, whom of all others I detested; and the being with a woman of my aunt's haughty disposition, is a circumstance almost as dreadful. I stood immoveably fixed, and believe I looked more like a statue than any thing living; when, unable any longer to bear the tormenting conflicts which overwhelmed my breast, I felt a sudden faintness seize me; Jenny observed

MISS SOMERSET.

observed it, and ran to fetch some hartshorn and water for my relief: a friendly sopha being near at hand, prevented my falling to the ground, and before her return a kind shower of tears had relieved my, almost, bursting bosom.---At this instant, who should appear before me, but that hated wretch Foxchase; I thought never any thing looked more horrible; he accosted me with an air of uncommon assurance, told me, faith he was glad to see me, on his soul I might believe him, he had the greatest regard for me in the world, and when I was his, which he hoped would be in less than an hour, he should prefer me to every thing, even to his dear fox-hounds. I listened to this indelicate discourse without interruption, otherwise than by glancing at him a sarcastic look filled with indignation; at last he pulled from his pocket the ring and license, and, with a superlative degree of brutality, strutting across the room, seated himself by me,

and taking one of my hands, which I endeavoured to with-hold from him, he asked me, with an affected tenderness, or rather whine, the cause of my shyness, declared he had no other view but to serve me, and would ever make it his study to promote my happiness; at the same time using every method to put the ring on my finger, while I struggled, as much as lay in my power, to get my hand from him; when he, resuming his wonted manner, pronounced, with a shocking oath, I was more unruly than the most unmanaged horse he was ever in possession of; however, he doubted not but I should be of a different way of thinking, after he had trained me at Blear-Hall for some time.

Finding my fullness had no effect on him, I now conjured him by all that was good and kind to think no farther of me, for that I never would be his, was my fixed resolution. When starting
from

from his seat, with a look truly savage, Zounds, Madam, said he, not all the powers on earth shall tear you from me, nor will I give you up on any consideration: I have your sister's consent to marry you immediately, for which purpose I have a clergyman now in the house: upon hearing this, I could not help giving a violent shriek, which brought Jenny to my assistance, when she found me in the arms of this ruffian, who held me fast, that I might not make my escape on her opening the door: the poor creature was terrified to death at seeing me in this situation, and her impatient looks seemed eager to know the cause. I told her I would immediately set out for my aunt's, being determined to quit a place now grown so hateful to me.

The monster did every thing in his power to dissuade me from this resolution; however, I was resolved to suffer

any hardship rather than be his.---He told me no distance, or place, should secure me from him, and that he would at all events pursue me to the end of the world.

I represented to him how unjust and unmanly it was to delight in tormenting one, who never wished him ill, and whom he could only blame for refusing to give her hand, unaccompanied with her heart: on this a servant entered to acquaint me the chaise was ready; on looking in his face, I saw it was the same insolent fellow whom I met in the court;---I asked him who was to be my guide; he answered, his Lady had ordered *him* to attend me. I then desired to see Jenny; but this was refused, as she was strictly commanded, not to see my departure, from a supposition that the poor creature might have shed a friendly tear at beholding my sufferings, which were much heightened,

heightned, when I heard Mr. Foxchace declare, that, notwithstanding he was that evening engaged with a party of choice-spirited bloods, the devil take him if he would not accompany me.

It was now impossible to withhold my resentment, therefore, assuming a most contumelious look, I loudly declared my sole view in quitting a place where I had once been so happy, was purely to avoid his hated sight; at the same instant flinging myself into the chaise, I ordered the postilion to drive with the utmost rapidity, leaving the wretch behind to vent his imprecations on those that fell in his way.

Behold me now a poor wanderer, banished from my sister's house; but O! my Lavinia! 'tis impossible to describe the melancholy situation of my mind: how do I lament the kind indulgence of my blessed parents! who fondly observed

my whole behaviour with so partial an eye, that I never, till now, met with a frown.---Often did my dying father's words occur to my memory, when taking one of my hands and one of my sister's as we sat on his bed-side, our eyes streaming with tears, he raised them to his mouth; and, after a kiss of most paternal regard, clasped them together, exhorting us at the same time, as we regarded his words, never to forsake each other; then giving me to the care of my sister, he begged she would now become my mother, whose heart appeared so much affected, that she could only answer by frequent sighs and loud sobbing. But why should I dwell any longer on this melancholy subject? let it suffice to tell you, strange as it must appear, my father died with such an exalted opinion of my sister's prudence, that he left me entirely to her care, and my whole fortune in her hands, should I not marry with her approba-

MISS SOMERSET. II

probation. In this situation I am arrived at the inn, and whilst my watchful guide was at dinner, I prevailed on the maid to get me pen and ink, and with no small difficulty have scribbled thus far unperceived; however, I must now pursue my tedious journey, tho' not without first assuring you, that to hear you have made the worthy Sir Thomas happy, will be some consolation to your afflicted

MELIORA SOMERSET.

LETTER II.

Miss SOMERSET to Miss KNIGHTLY.

M. Castle.

THE date of this will shew my faithful Lavinia that her wretched Meliora is now at her aunt's.---But how shall I attempt to paint the manner in which I am here confined?---Know then, I am a close prisoner, and yet appear to be at full liberty.---I have not a single soul to converse with, but those who are set as spies on my conduct; and yet my aunt's acquaintance are very numerous; but, alas! what avails that?---She is a woman of a most winning address, mixed with so much art, that 'tis impossible, for those who are not entirely dependent on her, to find her out; and to them her disguise is all thrown off, which

which I unhappily experience, as I receive nothing but severe reproaches, mixed with forbidding frowns.----How do I envy her acquaintance !----They are all blessed with her smiles, except me.----I really believe I should have a great affection for her, should she honor me with some degree of tenderness.----I consider her as the sister of my ever dear mother; and when I look stedfastly in her face, fancy I can sometimes trace the features of my indulgent parent.---How anxiously does my glowing bosom then beat! I am almost tempted to fling myself at her feet, and entreat her to use me with more affection, but am always prevented by the sternness of her manner, whenever her discourse is directed to me.

She is passionately fond of dress, and spares no pains to set her person off to the best advantage; but this I am sure she

she would dislike in me, nor shall I ever displease her in that particular.

She has this moment ordered me to take an airing with her; I dare not disobey her summons. Adieu

Now let me once more resume my pen, which for a whole week has lain idle.

When I stepped into the chaise, expecting we should have returned to dinner, I observed my aunt was dressed uncommonly elegant, but did not venture to ask the cause; and as she made no objection to my dishabille, which was only a blue silk night-gown, I contented myself with imagining, she expected company at dinner, and that I should return time enough to dress.

She now behaved with more than common kindness, and condescended to entertain

entertain me with many agreeable stories, till we came within sight of a magnificent house. Curiosity led me to enquire to whom it belonged; when she turned to me with a look of affected surprise, and scanning me from head to foot, as if she had not observed me before---Bless me, child! said she, why are you not dress'd?---You will be a disgrace to my family.---Did I not tell you last night, that I intended going to Sir Harry Frankford's, to whom that house belongs?---I protested it was the first time I had ever heard his name mentioned, but all to no purpose. She seemed to be filled with anger and resentment at my perverseness, as she called it; and frequently repeated how much she should blush for me, as every one would be decked with the greatest advantage; adding, it was Sir Harry's wedding-day; and, that it was always his custom to give an annual ball on the occasion.

I en-

I entreated her that she would permit me to set her down and suffer me to return home; assuring her, my dress suited too well with my spirits, *both* very unfit for so much gay company: however, she declared, I should go, that they may see what an obstinate girl she had to deal with: this last expression brought us to the house.

I would gladly have been excused getting out of the chaise, but it was now impossible; therefore I endeavoured to assume a more chearful air than I had done for some time, and followed her into a very elegant drawing room, where the company were not yet assembled.--- You may well imagine, I did not let slip so favourable an opportunity of admiring the richness of the furniture, which displayed to me the elegant taste of the owners.

The

The room was hung with green and silver, with sofas, curtains, and chairs, of the same;---a large glass in a silver frame, under which stood a table richly emboss'd, representing poor Susannah between the Elders.

My attention was soon taken off, by the entrance of Lady Frankford, who is really a well-bred woman, and has something inexpressibly graceful in her person and manner.---She made many apologies that she had not been ready to receive us; but politely excused herself, by saying she had been confined the whole morning in studying dresses, as Sir Harry intended to vary the scene, and to have a masquerade in the evening; for which purpose she had set twelve people to work.---My aunt told her she would spare them the trouble of fitting a habit for her; as she always on those occasions affected royalty, therefore she had at home the dress of an Indian

dian princess, and desired that her servant might be dispatched for it.

I now begged her permission to send for some clothes, at the same time apologising to Lady Frankford for my dishabille: she returned me a genteel compliment, which I plainly saw was by no means pleasing to my aunt, though she complied with my request.

At this instant Sir Harry Frankford entered the room:---He has an honesty in his countenance which is extremely taking, and seems to bespeak a natural goodness of heart, without being possessed of any very shining qualities.---But this deficiency appears to be made up in his Lady; who, as I have been told, has a most refined understanding, though she takes the nicest care to conceal her superiority from every eye, and behaves with so sweet an affability, as if she had borrowed from him all her merit.

The

The usual compliments over, he politely excused himself for appearing in his morning dress, but added,---my aunt was no stranger to his hour of rising; which was seldom before twelve; an indulgence he had so long accustomed himself to, that it was not now in his power to get the better of it.

My aunt asked him, how it was possible for him to break through it that morning seven years? O Madam! said he, what an inestimable jewel did I get by so doing!---when, fixing his eyes on Lady Frankford---Yes, continued he, from that blessed hour I date my happiness;---then rising up and taking one of her hands, he pressed it to his lips with all the ardor of a passionate lover, adding at the same time, that happy hour made it his.---She received his compliment with a pleasure very visible in her countenance, and had only time to tell him, that they were a very unfashionable couple,

couple, when the door opened and presented to our view Lord and Lady Moss :----never did I see before so great a contrast as appeared in these two ;---he has a genteel address with a natural sprightliness, that gives him a very agreeable air, and at first sight renders him pleasing,----yet I think he does not seem to be one of those that will improve much on a long acquaintance.----But if I was to attempt describing his antiquated Lady, it must be giving you an idea of every thing that is disagreeable.---Do not blame me, when I assure you I was never prejudiced so much before, against any one, merely from appearances ; and never found myself more in a humor to indulge a satirical vein, than on this bosom friend of my aunt's, for such I find she is ;----and should her heart correspond with her outward form, I am sure I shall suffer greatly by their unlucky intimacy.

She

She looks more than fifty, whilst his Lordship has scarce reached his thirtieth year.---You will not, after this, be surpris'd to find the match, of his side, was more for conveniency than love, as he is much addicted to the fashionable vice of gaming; and married her to retrieve his, almost ruined, fortune.

O my Lavinia! how is it possible people can so frequently sacrifice their happiness for the sake of a little wealth!---But to return.---The company were assembled, and, altogether, made a very brilliant appearance.---Those who gained my attention most, were the two Miss Lucas's, daughters of a neighbouring gentleman in this county.---They are extremely handsome, and would appear in a most amiable light, if they did not shew a conscious pleasure, in listening to the idle compliments that are continually paid them by every insignificant fop, who can find no other subject for discourse;
and

and to whose conversation they are so unhappy as to be frequently introduced by their brother, who is just returned from his travels, dressed in the true Parisian taste, and I think I should not do him a great piece of injustice, if I was to set him down as a compleat coxcomb.---- He is one of those kind of people that seem always in high good humor with themselves, which he shews on all occasions, by affecting to laugh at his own wit, whilst others are at a loss to find it out.----Will not my Lavinia say I am a little too severe? Yes, I know she will.--- Methinks I hear her blame me for indulging a disposition which she at all times so justly condemns;----but then by way of excuse consider the despicable light a man must always appear in, who acts so much out of character; and how ridiculous it looks to see a robust Englishman apeing all the flighty insignificant airs of a gay, volatile, flimsy petit-maitre.

This

This at present is the case of Mr. Lucas, though perhaps he may in time see the absurdity of such behaviour; and will then learn to act and think like a rational creature :---but till that happen, you must excuse my speaking of him in the light he now deserves, as you know I had always an abhorrence to those kind of beings.---His sister's partiality for him, makes them appear blind to his reigning foible :---I am inclined to think this is the case, not being willing to do my own sex so much injustice as to imagine they can any of them admire what ought to be so universally despised.

Miss Lucas addressed herself to me in very genteel terms, and expressed a great deal of pleasure at hearing I was to remain some time in their neighbourhood.

I had not time to answer her, before a servant whispered me that my clothes
were

were come ;---I was therefore immediately conducted to Lady Frankford's dressing-room, where I soon equipped myself in my laylock and silver sack, with a hoop of a moderate size, and the suit of point-lace, which my dear Lavinia may remember I purchased, the last time we were so happy together in Fleet-street.---I did not forget to place my jewels to the best advantage, but this was done more out of a compliment to Lady Frankford, whom I began to be much pleased with, than from any desire I had to appear fine ; as I never yet had a wish to recommend myself to any one's favour, who is to be taken by a gaudy, outside appearance ; as the liking those people express, depends entirely on the choice of your clothes, and is as variable as the apparel you wear ; and despicable as they appear, yet it is incredible to think the number one meets with, who are possessed of this turn of mind : nor was some of the company at
Frank-

Frankford-house totally exempt from this meanness, which I evidently experienced on my return to them, the eyes of every one being fixed on me at my entering the room; and those who but a few minutes before had scarcely thought me worth their observation, were now most loud in their praises of me to my aunt, and congratulated her, in a whisper, on the happy acquisition my company must be to her.

This helped to confound me greatly, as it was spoke loud enough for me to hear.----My aunt returned no answer, but the whole time kept her eyes rivetted on me with a haughty disdain :---at last rising from her seat, she moved towards the door, beckoning me to follow her; which I did with trembling steps, as I plainly perceived a storm near at hand.

We were scarcely out of the room, when she addressed me in this manner.---

Pray, how came you by these jewels?---In my opinion, they are your sister's right, nor can I conceive any thing more ridiculous than your appearing in this blaze, at a time when you pretend to be so unhappy: had you sent for your plain white negligee, and one row of white beads round your neck, it would have been more becoming than that staring necklace, which, if it is really your own, you ought not to wear, till you are the wife of Mr. Foxchace, as your twenty thousand pounds, as the world goes now, will scarcely maintain it.---However, she thanked her stars, that my father had acted once in his life-time right, by leaving me so intirely at the disposal of a prudent sister.

At her reflecting so severely on the memory of my ever dear father, I could not help bursting into tears, and begged her permission to retire.---No, indeed, Miss, answered she, you shall not shew
your

your airs here, but return to the company just as you are ; though I think you will not appear in a very desirable light, as you are far from being very lovely in your tears, not being formed for a weeping beauty.----I assured her, that, to be so, was the least of my thoughts ;----when answering me in an angry tone of voice, and fixing her eyes stedfastly on my face, she touched one of the drops of my ear-rings.---Then why are these ornaments, cried she, put on ? much handsomer, give me leave to tell you, than mine, and therefore I think very unbecoming your wear.----I assured her they were my own, and left me on the will of my late grandfather, who knew my sister was before provided with my mother's. ---O ! said she, affecting to soften a little, is that the case?----Well, I have been so long a stranger to my own family, that I know very little of their transactions ; when, turning from me with disdain, she immediately joined the company.

I followed her, as soon as I had breathed on my handkerchief, and applied it to my eyes, endeavouring to prevent, if possible, making any discovery of our disagreeable conference: however, my dejection was too visible,---the penetrating eyes of Lady Frankford soon saw it; she asked me, in a kind, inquisitive whisper, if I was indisposed;---I thanked her, and breathing a sigh, which I could not prevent, assured her, my mind suffered more than I was capable of supporting with a becoming fortitude.----She had only time to answer me by a look, filled with tenderness and surprise---when Sir Harry, looking at his watch, said, he wondered Mr. Buckland was not come, as he had faithfully promised not to fail him.---On the mention of his name, poor Miss Lucy Lucas's face was covered with a modest blush, whilst she affected the utmost care to conceal it.----The conversation now turned on the many good qualities he
was

was possessed of, nor had they scarcely done speaking of him when he entered the room. His appearance is greatly in his favor,---and I could not help observing, how much pleasure the addition of his company gave to the whole.

He addressed himself particularly to Miss Sophy Wansborough, who is really a fine young creature, and seemed entirely regardless of all the attention he paid her :----however, Sir Harry did not long suffer her to engross his conversation, as he began to rally him pretty severely on his late ill success at Newmarket.----Mr. Buckland answered him with a great deal of good humor and sprightliness, assuring him, he thought it the most fortunate event of his life ; as it had entirely cured him of a diversion, he was lately so fond of, and which in time might have been prejudicial to his fortune.

Lady Moss complimented him highly on the happiness he possessed, in being so soon convinced of his errors, and directing her eyes towards Lord Moss, in a significant manner said, she wished other people would follow his example.----Mr. Buckland made her a polite bow, assuring her he did not take the merit to himself, there being many other diversions he was equally fond of; but finding he could not support them all, he had only dropped that which was attended with most expence.----You may plead necessity as long as you please, Sir, added Lady Moss, yet I cannot help admiring you, for reasoning so prudently on parting with a favourite pursuit.----Your Ladyship does not consider, replied Mr. Buckland, the many advantages I have, for a long time, reaped in the acquaintance of the worthy Lord Freeman, who is, at all times, ready to give me his best advice, to which I hope I shall always pay a due regard. I presume, continued he, still
address

addressing himself to Lady Moss, your Ladyship and all this good company may have seen him.---Though his person, strikingly handsome as it is, yet, give me leave to observe, falls very short of those more lasting and amiable perfections of the mind, which he possesses in a high degree; and, though no more than five-and-twenty, he has the solidity of a man twice that age, mixed with all the agreeable vivacity which is natural to expect at his time of life; but, said he, lest the ladies should think I am partial to my friend, I will be silent, and let them judge of his merit: I expect him shortly to spend a few months with me, when I hope that all present will esteem him as I do.

Sir Harry and Lady Frankford said they had frequently heard of him, and as often wished for his agreeable acquaintance.----My aunt and the whole company expressed a great desire to see him.----

The young ladies eyes sparkled with pleasure at the agreeable neighbour they were shortly to have, whilst the young gentlemen looked, as if they feared he would too far outshine, if not totally eclipse, them.

Now shall I own to my dear Lavinia, that I never desired to see an entire stranger so much as I do this Lord Freeman?--Mr. Buckland's description of him has raised my curiosity greatly; but enough of this, lest you should think me very ridiculous, in desiring to behold a person I never, till lately, heard of, and one to whose acquaintance I may ever remain a stranger.

Sir Harry and Lady Frankford spared no pains to give us an elegant entertainment,---and, according to promise, in the evening we had a very grand masquerade

I have

I have not time to send you the particulars of the various and well-fancied dresses; but, this I assure you, it exceeded any thing I ever yet saw;---and the graceful and polite ease, with which the whole was conducted, charmed me, more than all the magnificent splendor I beheld.

My aunt and Sir Harry opened the ball.---Lady Moss has for some years declined dancing, therefore she was only a spectator, though, I fear, not of the good-natured kind.---Mr. Buckland was so obliging as to desire me to dance with him, which I was under a necessity of refusing, having the instant before engaged myself to Lord Moss.---The two Miss Lucas's had agreeable partners, yet it was plain to perceive Miss Lucy had not enjoyed herself since the appearance of Mr. Buckland.---I much wished to know the cause, and was looking on her with eyes of pity, when a communicative lady, that stood next me,

whispered with a satyrical air,---Observe how Miss Lucy Lucas is humbled to-night, at my dancing with her favourite Mr. Buckland! Well, I am glad of it!---I would have all those, who set up for beauties, mortified; though, I am sure, she has no pretensions to expect all his attention to-night, when there are so many present, her superiors; looking down on herself with a pleasing admiration, and then bowing to me.---How disgustful such a compliment was to me, I leave my Lavinia to judge.---I could not help reproving her a little severely, which prevented my hearing any more of her envious remarks the whole evening.

I have since learned that Miss Lucy Lucas was some time ago on the point of marriage with Mr. Buckland, but that it was broke off, by the earnest command of her father;---though it is generally conjectured there is a private correspondence still continued between the
young

young people: but this is hinted with great caution, lest it should reach the ears of old Mr. Lucas, who is reckoned one of the most passionate men in the world.

What various unhappy objects do we meet with throughout life?—None, my friend, are exempt from their troubles, and those only are to be envied, who can bear them with the greatest patience and resignation; like the good Sir Harry and Lady Frankford, who I am sorry to find have experienced great affliction from the loss of their only child, by that fatal distemper the small-pox.—Pity it is they had not known our worthy friend Dr. Reid, of Chelsea, who would have removed all prejudices against inoculation, and certainly have saved the heir to their estate.

I had almost forgot to tell you the particular marks of favor Mr. Lucas

bestowed on me throughout the whole evening.---He took great notice of me, and frequently declared to Lord Mofs, in a sort of a whisper, that it was not fair for a married man to engross so amiable a partner to himself.

I thought my aunt seemed to observe it with pleasure, and whispered three or four times to Lady Mofs, whilst both their eyes were directed on me.----Do not blame me for this suspicion, though I own I am angry with myself for mentioning it, as I fear it betrays such a foible as I would wish not to have ranked among my many other failings.

I am greatly surpris'd, my dear girl, that I have not heard from my sister.----I hope Foxchase has now resigned all his pretensions to me, and that I shall no longer be persecuted with his addresses.---The very thought of it gives me new life, and makes me think my greatest suffer-
ings

ings are at an end; encouraged to hope for the best too, by my aunt's behaviour, which is rather more kind than usual;---but as I hear her coming, I must hasten to conclude.----Do not forget to mention my friendly regards to your good mother, and Sir Thomas;---tell them, I hope to return, and be once more happy, at Knightly-Court, which be assured is the first wish of your truly affectionate,

MELIORA SOMERSET.

LET-

L E T T E R III.

Miss SOMERSET in Continuation.

M. Castle.

HOW often, my charming girl, are we deceived with outside appearances!---Frequently do we flatter ourselves with the greatest security, when we are the most beset with ills.

In my last letter I thought myself more happy than I had been for some time before,---but, O! what a short-lived pleasure did I enjoy? Soon did the pleasing hope vanish from my breast, and every disagreeable thought took possession of it;----like an unwelcome stranger, it intruded on my mind, and drove every pleasing idea far, very far, from your Meliora.

My

My aunt's seeming kindness lasted no longer, than till the arrival of Lady Moss, which was in a few hours after I finished my last; Lord Moss accompanied her, but he staid only 'till the next morning, as, he said, business of importance obliged him to be in London.

For many days after his departure, Lady Moss and my aunt were closetted the greatest part of their time.---I was one morning walking on the terrass in the garden, (as it is customary with me every day after breakfast) when the ladies joined me: surpris'd at so unexpected a favor, and quite at a loss to comprehend the meaning of it, I remained for some time in silent suspense:---however, Lady Moss too soon put me out of doubt, and gave me to understand, that those dreadful suspicions, which I hinted at in my last letter, were not without foundation.

I am come, says she, Miss Somerset, assuming an air of authority which I thought ill became her, to congratulate you on the valuable conquest I find you have made since you have been in our neighbourhood.----I affected to smile, assuring her, I was quite ignorant of it, nor had I vanity enough to believe it was any thing more than her Ladyship's rallery.----At this she reddened excessively, and drawing herself up, assured me, in her usual, formal forbidding stile, that she had no desire to rally me, nor should she have said so much, had it not been from the great pleasure it gave her of my being likely to do so well; saying, a man of Mr. Lucas's figure and fortune, was not to be despised, and that, she really believed, he had at present regard enough for me, to marry me; but, how long that passion may last, she could not tell, as it was not in her power to answer for the fickleness of this age; therefore she thought there was no time to be lost.----

Certainly,

Certainly, dear Lady Mofs, replied my aunt, you reason well; nor ought such an advantageous proposal to be rejected. ---My niece has another offer, equally agreeable to the family; but, as she professes a great dislike to that gentleman, it is put off, 'till she may be in a more reasonable way of thinking.----I expect him here in a few days;---when, if she disapproves of this last proposal, I hope she will oblige us, by accepting of Mr. Foxchace, who is an entire stranger to me; yet her sister's recommending him so strongly in this letter, which I have just received, is sufficient for me, to be desirous of having it speedily concluded.

I then fell on my knees, and it was not without great difficulty, that I kept myself from fainting at her feet.

I conjured her, by every tender tye, never more to mention the name of Foxchace,---assuring her, the sound of it
shocked

shocked my very soul. She endeavoured to spurn me from her; and at last, raising her voice, she said to me,---Indeed, Miss, you act your part surprisngly well;---I think you would cut no inconsiderable figure in the part of a tragedy-queen :---Pray, what school have you been at, to learn all these pretty distressful airs?---But give me leave to tell you, I have too great a regard for your happiness, for them to have any effect on me; therefore I command you to rise immediately, and if you have such a dislike to Mr. Foxchace, as you really pretend, prepare to receive the addresses of Mr. Lucas, who will be here instantly.---If you now dispute my commands, I shall not hesitate a moment, on thinking you have bestowed your heart without our permission, and Padstow is certainly the man that has it.---Your sister, I fear, was not misinformed, when she heard of his renewing his addresses to you, in a letter, whilst you was at Knight-

ly-Court,---and that sly, artful girl, Lavinia Knightly, carries it on for you.

So cruel an aspersions on my amiable friend, touched me more than all the rest.----I told her, in a resolute tone of voice, such as I never dared to speak to her in before, that I looked on your friendship, by far, the greatest happiness I enjoyed, and should ever esteem it as a most valuable blessing.----No doubt, answered she, but you will, whilst she manages your intrigue so cleverly ;---but a time, perhaps, will come, when you may wish you had never seen her.----Pray, what will you do with Padstow?---his fortune is so trifling, he cannot afford to marry you without one ;---and not a penny will you have from your sister or myself.----However, I will take some care you shall no longer have the use of pen and ink ; nor shall you ever be suffered to write to your faithful Miss Knightly.----No---no, I will have no clan-

clandestine affairs transacted in my house.

I assured her I would never do any thing that should be disagreeable to her, and declared, upon my word, I had never seen or heard from Mr. Padstow, since we were both children; adding, that she well knew he had been settled abroad for some years.----To convince me of the truth of this, replied she with a haughty air, you must instantly prepare your heart to receive the honor Mr. Lucas intends doing you.

O! my Lavinia! what a dreadful task is here?----Lady Mofs looked with pleasure at every cruel word my aunt pronounced.----I had no kind advocate to intercede for me, or soften the rigor with which she treated me.----I moved by her side in a pensive manner, with my down-cast eyes fixed on the ground, and seemed like a criminal, that was already
ready

ready condemned, whilst my aunt loaded me with many unkind epithets,---such as fullen and obstinate girl, and others of the like tendency,---and that no one but herself could conceive the trouble she had with me ; however, she was determined to be obeyed in this, therefore ordered me to hasten in and receive Mr. Lucas with a becoming civility.

I removed from her with a heart too much oppressed with grief to utter one word ; and repairing instantly to my dressing-room, flung myself into a chair with a mind too much disordered for reflection ; but as I am not long to enjoy the pleasure of scribbling, should think myself inexcusable, if I did not embrace the present opportunity, and, therefore, snatching up my pen, have written this incoherent epistle, whilst my aunt and Lady Moss are in deep confabulation, the result of which, I fear, will not be determined much in favor of your unhappy Meliora.

I dread

I dread the thoughts of listening to the fulsome addreffes of Mr. Lucas. What cruelty it is to have my inclinations forced, when the greateft desire I have, is to remain fingle!

The only confolation I have left, is in the hopes that Mr. Lucas will be generous enough to decline his vifits, when I fhall tell him how very difagreeable they are to me.----But then what fhall I do to get rid of Foxchace? O Lavinia! I greatly want your friendly advice.----My aunt and Lady Mofs—I hear them coming up, and fuppofe, with a defign to rob me of the only pleafure I have left. Adieu.

I was right in my conjectures.----My aunt immediately came into my room,---fnatched up the ink-ftand,---and marched away in a feeming hurry; faying, I fhould no longer have that conveniency, whilft I remained under her roof.---However,

ever, she soon returned, and, with a look of rather more complacency, told me Mr. Lucas was below,---and ordered me to follow her down stairs ; which I did.

When we came into the dining-room, his back was towards us. He was fixed before a large glass, and so wrapped in contemplation on his adorable person, (the charms of which, in his own opinion, are of the utmost consequence, and not to be equalled,) that he did not perceive our entrance, 'till we were advanced more than half way up the room.----At last, starting round, he assured us, with a negligent careless air, he was rejoiced at seeing us ;----it was a happiness he had languished for, ever since the fortunate evening he spent with us at Sir Harry Frankford's.---You are very obliging, Sir, replied my aunt, but must excuse me, if I think this compliment is paid a little at the expence of your sincerity, or I should otherwise imagine you would
have

have taken an earlier opportunity of visiting M---Castle.

On this he affected a serious air, saying, Make me not the most miserable of beings, Madam, by doubting the truth of what I tell you, that nothing but the most unlucky accident in the world should have prevented my coming last Thursday: I had set out for that purpose, but was not got far, before the horses very unfortunately took fright at a wind-mill, and suddenly rearing themselves up, threw the coachman from the box, and then galloped away at a furious rate: they were at last stopt by the chariot's falling against a bank. My servants soon came to my assistance, when they found me in a miserable condition, my face appearing very bloody, which I imagined was owing to its being a good deal cut against the glasses, as they were broken all to pieces: my legs were likewise much bruised, by my endeavouring
to

to jump out, whilst the mad devils were in their full career ; but finding a thing of that sort quite impracticable, I at last gave over attempting it, expecting nothing so much as to have my neck broken, and looking on every moment as my last. In this miserable condition I was with great difficulty taken out of the chariot, my face so bloody, that it ran in streams down a most elegant embroidered coat, which I had not worn before, since my return to England.--- This mortifying sight alarmed me much ; ---nor could I help cursing my evil genius that had occasioned this unlucky misfortune.---Pardon, Sir, said I, my interrupting you ;---I think, after such a providential escape, you should rather have thanked the divine being that had preserved your life.

My aunt at this looked pleased.---Mr. Lucas proceeded, If you think that life, dear Miss Somerset, worth preserving, it

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will

will be happy to own, I live only for you.----Who, my Lavinia, could have expected such an answer?----I was confounded,---and wished to recall what I had uttered:---he was silent, and looked, as if he expected me to speak.----I saw he enjoyed my confusion, and doubted not but he construed it greatly in his own favor;---therefore, assuming all my courage, I told him I thought it behoved every one to be thankful for their own preservation. Yet I could not help being much surpris'd at perceiving no marks, left in his face, of those dreadful wounds, he had been speaking of: my aunt likewise said, she was just going to beg the favor of him, to give her the recipe he had used, as it must be a very wonderful thing, to perform so sudden a cure, without leaving the least scar behind.----A right observation, Ladies!---replied the Beau, laughing aloud, to be sure, with no other design than to shew his fine teeth; I was not quite so unlucky

lucky as I first imagined myself, as the blood I have been speaking of proceeded chiefly from a violent blow, I received in my nose, which could not very speedily be stopped :----the wounds which I thought were great, on examination, proved so trifling, that, in a few days, they intirely disappeared ;---my legs, indeed, were much bruised, and continued very painful for some time.----I was obliged to mount one of my servants horses, and returned home in a most doleful condition, which terrified the whole family, and alarmed me more at seeing their consternation, than at my own sufferings. ----My sister Lucy fainted away,---my eldest sister could scarcely support herself, ----and my mother had just presence of mind enough left, to dispatch a messenger for Mr. Bright the surgeon.----I did all I could to comfort them, though as yet I imagined myself much worse than I proved to be :---however, Mr. Bright was not sent for in vain, as the coach-

man's arm was broken in two places, but by timely assistance, he is in a fair way of recovery.

I sincerely congratulate you, Sir, replied my aunt, on your happy escape, and let me advise you, to be particularly careful of a life, which this accident shews, is of so much consequence to your friends.

O! Madam, continued he I wanted no fresh proof of their goodness, which has been so manifest to me on all occasions;---and though my father is one of the most passionate men in the universe, yet he is not less affectionate than the rest, and would, I am well convinced, have been greatly shocked at seeing me in such a deplorable situation, had he not been luckily from home at my return.----Pardon, Ladies, my dwelling so long on a trifling subject, which I have been insensibly led into.---I not only pardon you, answered my aunt, but return you my most cordial thanks for
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the kind relation; as the hearing of an agreeable harmony subsisting in families, always gives me infinite pleasure.

O! my Lavinia, why did she speak a language so foreign from her heart!---- I have often heard my mother declare, she would never be on terms with any of her own.----Yet, so it is, she dissembles her real sentiments to every body, under so artful a disguise, that she is greatly esteemed by her acquaintance.

Mr. Lucas advanced towards me, and taking my hand, said, You have not, dear Miss Somerset, forgiven my talkativeness:---I fear, you will impute a deal of vanity to my share.----Rather think, Sir, I shall envy the happiness you possess in the love of your relations.----I could not, that moment, help glancing a look at my aunt;---she seemed confused, and, standing up, rung the bell;---on a servant's entering, she ordered some chocolate, and then withdrew, under pretence of seeking for Lady Moss.

How gladly, my friend, would I have followed her, had it been possible ;---my situation was truly embarrassing.---Mr. Lucas was for some moments silent.---I talked of indifferent things, in hopes to prevent his speaking what I so much dreaded to hear.---He arose from his seat, and walked three or four times cross the room, appearing to be much disordered.---I asked him why his sisters had not been kind enough to accompany him ? He said the arrival of Sir James Hanham, and a good many other friends from Gloucestershire, late last night, prevented them ; and indeed, had not that been the case, he would gladly have dispensed with their company on this occasion, as he was very selfish, and desired to engross all my conversation to himself, which he could not have obtained, had they been present.---This was pronounced with the utmost earnestness, and spoken in a tone of voice, very different from what I had ever heard him before.---At last, taking
my

my hand, he pressed it to his lips, saying, with great gravity,---May I hope, dear Miss Somerset is disengaged? Indeed, Sir, I am, I replied.---Happy, thrice happy then am I!----And will you, Madam, own it, with that charming, noble, becoming frankness? Most excellent of women!----May I then presume to hope you will not be cruel to one who adores you, whose very wish is for you alone?---My fortune is large, but that is no otherwise a consideration, than as it will enable me----

He was going on, but I could no longer suffer him to proceed---Hold, Sir, said I,---I did not intend to mislead you in this manner,---when I mentioned my being disengaged, which I again acknowledge to be true; yet, notwithstanding that, I must desire the favor of you, never more to speak one word on this subject, though I think myself greatly obliged to you for the honor you do me; yet, Sir, be assured it is impossible for me

ever to return you any thing more than my friendship, which, if you are kind enough to follow my request, shall be very lasting.

Good heavens ! exclaimed he, looking at me very earnestly, what do I hear ! ----Is it possible so cruel a heart can belong to that lovely form !----For God's sake, dear Madam, recall your dreadful sentence,----make me not the most miserable of men,---tell me only you will consider of it,---perhaps time and my sincere attachment may help to alter your opinion.---It never can, Sir, I replied ; nor have I ever yet seen the man I could think of giving my hand to.----He bit his lips, and looked angry ; then walking towards the window---Nor I the woman, Miss Somerset, give me leave to tell you, 'till I saw you.----I wish that had not been, Sir, since it is productive of a passion, which, I again assure you, can never be returned by me.----I wish the same, Madam ! walking up and down in a hurry ;---yet
never

never did I expect to have a sincere flame so ill requited.----This is the first time I was ever *honourably* in love, (mind that, Lavinia,) and curse me if I fall into the snare again.----You will oblige me, Sir, by saying no more on a subject, so ill suited to entertain either of us; therefore we will drop it, and join Lady Moss, and my aunt, who I see are walking in the garden.----No, Madam, said he, you must excuse me,---I am too much discomposed to see any body:---then, going towards the glass, he surveyed himself in a careless manner, saying at the same time with a forced laugh, he thought, till now, it was not in his power to act so like a fool.

The ladies at this instant returned, and soon saw Mr. Lucas's countenance was visibly changed; for which they looked at me with more severity, than can be described.---My aunt praised the loveliness of the weather, and made that an excuse for her long absence.----Mr.

Lucas behaved with great fullness; and, taking out his watch, said he would order the chariot.---My aunt pressed him in the strongest terms to stay and dine, which he declined, and soon after took his leave, with an air and manner very different from that he at first received us with.

It is impossible to describe the treatment I now met with; my aunt's reproofs were dreadfully severe;---she told me, she could plainly perceive how much I had disobeyed her commands,---and 'till I could think of behaving more suitably to her will, I must take the consequence of her displeasure.---Lady Moss, drawing herself up, said, indeed she could not help being concerned at the visible discomposure of Mr Lucas, whom, notwithstanding her long acquaintance with him, she had never seen half so much ruffled before.---Then I look on it, Madam, I replied, he has past his life hitherto without contradiction, otherwise,
the

the little I said could not so very much disturb his natural tranquillity.---Hold your peace, said my aunt :---I dare say, if the truth was known, you gave yourself great airs to him :---however, you will be the sufferer.---I am only sorry, at considering any relation of mine should be so obstinately blind to their own happiness, and interest : perverse, unthinking girl ! who would, if you was suffered, run headlong to your own ruin.---Wound me not, dear Madam, said I, by such cruel aspersions as these ;---believe me, I wish in every thing to fulfill your will ;---and was not my whole happiness at stake, I would immediately comply with your request ; but, in my opinion, 'tis neither consistent with honor, or honesty, to give my hand to a person, for whom I have no regard ; as I should, by so doing, not only involve myself, but the gentleman I engage with too, in the greatest misery ; therefore, on my knees, I entreat you, to let me remain single, 'till an offer is made to

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me,

me, more suitable to my inclinations.---- You are not capable of judging for yourself, answered she, nor shall I ever consent for you to follow your own obstinate will, but insist on your accepting Mr. Foxchace, or Mr. Lucas, as those are the two we have made choice of; on which I shall leave you to reflect at your leisure: then ordering the carriage, she stepped in, accompanied by Lady Moss, saying nothing to me when they should return.

I had not now my friendly pen to alleviate my distress; therefore, flinging myself into a chair, I soon became like one quite stupified with grief and amazement; nor do I know how long I should have continued in this situation, had I not been roused by hearing a carriage drive into the court;----on going to the window, I saw Lady Frankford just stepping out;----I ran to receive her with more pleasure than I should any one else in the neighbourhood:--- She seemed much pleased at the joy I expressed

expressed at seeing her, nor did she appear the least disappointed, when I told her my aunt was from home.---I then asked for Sir Harry:---He is, said she, extremely well, and would gladly have accompanied me hither, had he not been prevented by Lord Freeman, and Mr. Buckland, who came just as we were setting out.

So then, Lavinia, Lord Freeman is come;---I wish much to see this surprising man:---though, at the same time, I blame my idle curiosity, and think it would be serving me right not to have it indulged:---perhaps that may be the case; and if so, I hope to make myself very easy.---Indeed, why should I not? since this disappointment would be very trifling, when compared to the many I have already received:---and yet I think I should be a little mortified to have him so near us, and be denied the pleasure of seeing him; but enough of this, and now let me return to Lady Frankford, whose

whose pardon I ought to ask for this foolish digression.

She is, my Lavinia, a most amiable woman, nor can I help admiring her, for the friendly manner with which she behaved to me. She first began, with asking me if I was indisposed, saying, my countenance was much altered since she saw me last.---I answered only by a sigh, when taking my hand, with a look full of sweetness---Why that sigh, my charming girl?---The tenderness of her voice and manner, was so different from what I had been lately accustomed to receive, that it swelled my heart too big for utterance.---This she observed, and with the utmost gentleness, entreated me to make her acquainted with my grief, saying, my dejected looks too plainly convinced her, I had something that preyed upon my spirits :---then with a beseeching softness, she said, Make me your friend,---you shall ever find me a faithful one ;---and though it is very uncommon

common to be addressed in this manner, from the lips of a stranger,---yet be assured, it is not more sudden than sincere: nor can I account for my partiality, but the first moment I saw you, I was prejudiced in your favor, which is a thing quite unusual to me, as I am seldom taken with new faces, let them be ever so agreeable.---Those words you dropped to me at Frankford-Abbey, were not lost; ---I have frequently thought of them, and as often wished to know the cause of your unhappiness.

I was all this time, my Lavinia, silent, nor could I as yet make one grateful reply to what I heard ;---however, I involuntarily pressed her hand to my lips, which I saw she was pleased with.---Come, continued she, let me know your whole history,---I am all impatience to assist so much loveliness.---The tears now began to trickle down my cheeks ; when she looked at me with a sorrowful surprise, saying, I fear I have said too much,

much,---my friendship has made me impertinent, and you unhappy; therefore, dry your eyes;---I will no longer be inquisitive to know, what I apprehend will give you pain to relate.

O! my dear Lady Frankford, replied I, suffer my tears, they are such as have been a long, very long time strangers to my eyes.---These, Madam, are tears of joy;---let them flow in streams, and testify my gratitude for so much goodness: they have now given me utterance, which, for some time, I have been deprived of; notwithstanding the many efforts I have made to thank your Ladyship for your unmerited kindness to a poor friendless girl.---What do I hear? answered she, looking with great astonishment,---is it possible my charming Miss Somerset can, with any degree of propriety call herself by that unhappy name? God forbid it should be so, whilst she is under the care of an aunt, who is so universally esteemed.---I shall
ever

ever be cautious, Madam, of saying any thing to the prejudice of my aunt, whom I shall always acknowledge myself greatly indebted to, for introducing me to your Ladyship, and shall, I am sure, bless the hour that raised me such a friend: but words are too weak to express the many obligations I think myself under.---Not a syllable more of this, said she, interrupting me, you are welcome to all I can do for you, provided you will never mention the words, obligation, gratitude, or thanks, as I have an utter dislike to them; nor indeed shall I ever be entitled to such, from you, as the pleasure of serving so good a girl will always overpay me.

For this polite compliment, I made her a courtesy, saying, at the same time, I would not, if possible, wound her ears with words that were disagreeable to them, notwithstanding it would be some relief to speak what my heart was so full of:---I was going on, when she
held

held up her finger;---Take care, my lovely girl, said she, or you will, un-awares, stumble again on your favourite words.---I blushed, and was silent.---O! my Lavinia, what true delicacy is this worthy lady possessed of? She takes the greatest pleasure in heaping favors on others, whilst she herself behaves like the person most obliged.

I now began my short, unhappy story.---Her Ladiship was much affected with it,---and, more than once, applied her handkerchief to her lovely eyes.---On my mentioning the behavior of Foxchace, she exclaimed, O! the vile wretch!--I thought, till now, it was impossible for any man to act so like a brute.---When I came to speak of Mr. Lucas, she shook her head, saying, Take care of him, my dear, he is a dangerous man, and, if report speaks true, his morals are not the best.---I am, continued she, surprised at your aunt's behavior, nor can I imagine what should
make

make her act so different in this, from her usual character.---Your sister has likewise been esteemed, by the generality of the world, as a prudent, good woman; therefore I am staggered what to think of their present behavior.---Perhaps it may be only to try, how calmly you will support your misfortunes, as they may be of the same opinion with many others in the world, who think it right, that young people should be inured to some troubles, in order to make them pass through life with more ease, should they happen at a time when they are less able to bear them.

Admitting this to be the case, Madam, ---yet does not your Ladyship think, they have taken a wrong method, and carried things already too far?---I much fear my spirits will never be as they were.---Indeed, indeed I cannot bear Mr. Foxchace, nor Mr. Lucas. God forgive me, they are my aversion.---Be easy, my good girl,---neither of them are worthy of you.---I doubt

doubt not but you are reserved for a much better fate. She looked tenderly on me.---I hope so too, Madam, said I, though I see very little likelihood of a happy change at present.---I then, with a sigh, regretted the loss of my pen and ink; which her Ladiship no sooner heard, than she replied, with ineffable goodness, I wish it was in my power to relieve all the distresses of my lovely Meliora, with the same ease I can this; at the same time taking out of her pocket the prettiest toy I ever beheld, saying, Guess what this may be.---I looked on it in silent admiration, as I had never seen any thing of the kind before.---This little toy, continued she, contains nothing less than pens, ink, and wafers; it is the same I always used when writing to Sir Harry, before our marriage; it was sent me from London by a relation of his, and I now present it to you: write to your friend without reserve; I will convey your letters to her, since you are at a
loss.

loss how to send them otherwise.---In the mean time, you may depend on my endeavouring all I can to soften your aunt's behavior; and I am not without hopes of having some influence over her.

Judge, my Lavinia, how my heart overflowed at all this unspeakable goodness!---Ought I ever more to repine at my lot?---How indulgent has the divine providence been to me, in raising such a friend, when I thought myself deserted by the whole world, except my Lavinia?---I was about to fling myself at her Ladiship's feet, and acknowledge my gratitude for her abundant kindness, having, at that instant forgot the injunctions she had laid on me: however, I was prevented by her rising hastily from her seat, saying, I am sorry to leave you, my dear girl, yet am under a necessity of shortening my visit, in order to fulfill my promise to Sir Harry, which was, to return early, that I may see Lord
Freeman,

Freeman, who is extolled as the wonder of the age.

I think, my Lavinia, in this he labours under a disadvantage, as every body expects to see something very extraordinary; and, perfect as he may be, yet few people answer the character that is formed of them on those occasions.---Lady Frankford is of the same opinion, and has promised to let me know her real sentiments of him at our next meeting; 'till when, she earnestly desired me to keep up my spirits.---As she was stepping into the chariot, she tapped my cheek with her fan, saying, How gladly would I take my new friend with me; yet I do not despair, added she with a gracious smile, of our being very happy at Frankford-house, ere it be long.---How undeserving, Madam, am I of all this goodness! The horses galloped off full speed, as if in haste to return to their beloved home.

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I could not help breathing out, Farewell, my excellent friend!---Do not be jealous, Lavinia, I hope I have a sufficient room in my heart for you both.---My pen moves with the utmost swiftness, as if in haste to communicate the joyful tidings to my lovely girl ;--my heart too has lost some of its weight, since this charming *tetê-à-tetê*;---and yet, my Lavinia, I sometimes fear it will not be in her power to serve me, in the manner she is desirous of, as my aunt is too much wrapped up in Lady Moss, for any one else to have much influence with her.---However, I will not anticipate,---imaginary troubles are often worse than real ones.

My aunt and Lady Moss are this instant returned ;---two carriages besides accompanying them.---The darkness of the evening prevents my discovering to whom they belong:---however, I will suspend my curiosity, nor will I quit my room, 'till I am summoned to attend them.

them.---Hark ! I hear Lady Moss's voice in the anti-chamber.---She speaks angrily.---What can it mean?---Surely, it cannot be my aunt and her Ladiship entered into a dispute;---yet, if it should be so, may I not reap some benefit by it? as I have reason to believe my aunt would abate a great deal of her severity, was she not so much influenced by this piece of formality.

Shall I lay down my pen and listen to their discourses? No, my Lavinia.---I have drawn to the farthest end of the room, and shut my ears from any word that may escape them:---rather let me die with curiosity, than indulge it at the expence of my honor.---What pain would the secret give, should it prove ever so advantageous to me, after considering the unjustifiable method I took to gain it.---Yet why should I proceed thus, when I know you abhor such a disengenuous proposal, and will not I fear forgive the question; therefore am determined to blot
it

it out.---Ah! I am prevented, being called to attend my aunt,---I tremble at the summons,---yet I must obey.---But first let me assure my amiable friend that I am, and ever will be, her truly affectionate

MELIORA SOMERSET.

LETTER IV.

Miss SOMERSET in Continuation.

M. Castle.

O Lavinia! how greatly was I mistaken with regard to my aunt and Lady Moss; never were they on better terms than now: I really believe they have not a thought which is concealed from each other; and yet I am, and ever shall be, amazed at their agreeing so well,

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as in their persons and manners they are direct opposites. My aunt has rather a pleasing person, with a manner, that I can no way describe, than by telling you it seems to claim respect from every body, and makes her appear in all companies to a very great advantage. I should, myself, admire her much, would she condescend to treat me with the same affability she does others ; but this I must never expect, as I am unluckily born to be the unhappy sport of fortune, and fear Lady Moss contributes not a little towards it.

She is, my Lavinia, the most disagreeable, antique figure I ever beheld, and has all the stiff formality of the last age ; catching up one side of her gown, whenever she leaves the room, and never returns without dropping a very ceremonious curtsy. She condemns the most innocent mirth with the greatest severity, and frequently exclaims with much warmth against the many liberties young
2 people

people indulge themselves in; saying, it shocks her to see them lounging their elbows on the table, or else lolling their backs in a chair, which she has always taken care to prevent, by sitting on a stool; nor has she ever spoiled her shape, by affecting the odious fashion of wearing thin stays. This, my friend, is very visible; for, notwithstanding she is almost six feet high, her waist is but little more than a span.

I think I hear you say---Hold, Meliora!---lay down your pen,---this satyrical humour of your's ought not to be indulged.---Thank you, Lavinia.---Know, then, Lord Moss is returned much sooner than he was expected; and the altercation I heard in the anti-chamber, was between him and his lady.---Their looks to each other are distant and cool,---not one endearing glance do I ever perceive pass between them; and yet, you know, I am, on those occasions, a nice observer.---He has brought with

him Mr. and Mrs. Heartfree.—She is very handsome, tall, genteel, and full of life and spirit.—Lord Mofs first carried them to his own house, but finding his lady not returned, he drove immediately here, and met my aunt's carriage just as they were coming into the avenue.—Lady Mofs pretended she was ready to faint, at his unexpected return, and could not for a long time be composed.—However, I am apt to think Mrs. Heartfree contributed most to her disorder and surprise ; as I once heard her say to my aunt, O Miss Montague ! I am greatly distressed at the company of this gay woman :—I fear it designs me no good.—Lord Mofs at that instant came into the room, which prevented her saying more.

He is, my Lavinia, much altered,—his sprightly manner has quite forsaken him.—I much wish to know the cause of this sudden change ; yet must patiently wait, 'till time shall reveal it.—I hear some one coming,—Adieu,

I am

I am once more, my Lavinia, left quite alone.—The ladies and gentlemen are all gone for an airing, without asking me whether I chose to accompany them or not;—no very polite behaviour, you'll say.—However, I think myself not a little happy, in being thus suffered to indulge my solitude: the highest entertainment I can in my present situation experience.

The morning is beautiful, beyond description, which induces me to take a stroll in the garden.—There, my friend, will I reflect at leisure on the pleasing happy scenes we have formerly passed together; and for a moment endeavour to banish those gloomy ideas, which are often present to my mind.—Farewel!

I had not been many minutes in the garden, listening to the harmonious warbling of the feathered choir, when my mind imperceptibly grew more at ease; and I felt for a moment that tran-

quillity, which has so long been banished from the breast of your Meliora.—Pleased at my humour, and willing to indulge it, I immediately ran into the breakfast-parlour, and taking up my guitar, which has so long lain useless, I hastened with it into the garden, and seating myself on one of the slopes, I instantly began that little song of Bates's, which you used so much to admire.—I had not quite finished it, before I heard something move, and looking up, who should I perceive but Mr. Lucas, with his arms folded, standing directly before me!—Judge my confusion, Lavinia! I arose hastily, and would have retired, but he, respectfully bowing, said, Pardon my intrusion, dear Miss Somerset and let me intreat you not to leave me, 'till I have apologised for my unpolite behaviour on my last visit; assuring me, the recollection of it had not afforded him a moment's peace.—Then calling himself a thousand block-

heads

heads for being so unguarded, before the only woman whom his soul adored; and, by way of excuse, attributed it to his natural sincerity, saying, it was out of his power to act the hypocrite, even at the expence of his life, which he found it was impossible to support, unless I would give him some hopes of being happy.

You may be assured, my Lavinia, I said all I could to prevent his dwelling on a subject so very disagreeable to me; yet all to no purpose.—He still persisted in his odious suit.—At last taking both my hands, and pressing them together, For God's sake hear what I have to say.—I am the most miserable of men, if you refuse me this request.—You must excuse me, Sir, I replied, I can hear no more.—I have already said, I never will be yours, therefore you distress me beyond measure, by obliging me to repeat, what I so earnestly wished to hear no more of.—I was going on, when

E 4.

he

he stopped me, saying, Cruel Miss Somerset!—are you determined then to kill me by this unkind frankness? and down he dropped on his knees.—I held out my hand, Pray, Sir, rise.—Never, Madam, 'till you give me hopes of calling this mine; catching hold of my outstretched hand, which I thought he would have devoured with his lips.—I was extremely displeased at this freedom; my countenance soon betrayed it.—I tore my hand from him, and with a haughty, angry air, said, I would leave him to reflect at leisure on his behaviour.—I was going; when, taking hold of my gown, No, Madam, you must not leave me in this dreadful situation:—I cannot support your displeasure:—tell me first, you will forgive me;—tell me you will not think unfavourably of what is past.—I never can forgive you, Sir, if you still persist in this manner.—I have hitherto made it a rule to act with candor, and should hate myself, was I capable of trifling.

trifling with any one.—When I know my own heart, I think it would be highly ungenerous, if not criminal, to keep another's in suspense; therefore, pray let me hear no more of what I am determined never to comply with.—I was again going,—he still held me fast, muttering to himself the last words I had pronounced; and looking wildly round him, at last fixing his eyes stedfastly on me, he demanded, in a positive tone, to know the reason of my disliking him, saying he could not have expected such treatment, after my so frankly owning, I was disengaged; adding likewise, that my aunt was no stranger to the sincere passion he entertained for me, and that he was well assured she would be his friend on the occasion.

This I knew but too well, my Lavinia, and could not help fetching a sigh at the dreadful reflection:—however, he did not observe it, as he was speaking with great warmth, saying, I must look

on him as a tame fool, should he consent to give me up, when he had so powerful an advocate in his behalf. Indeed, indeed, Sir, replied I, lifting up both my hands, I should look on you as a worthy good man, and would ever revere you as such.—There is no bearing this supplicating posture, Miss Somerset;—I fear you will subdue me at last.—He looked tenderly on me, and turned away in great emotion.—He talked incoherently to himself for some time, then came towards me with a wild despairing countenance that terrified me beyond measure, saying, Ask any thing of me, Madam, I am this moment determined to grant your request; and, not waiting for my reply, he snatched from the scabbard his sword—This friendly weapon, Miss Somerset, shall rid you at once of that person who is so hateful to your sight; and, pointing it to his breast, seemed as if, at that instant, he was going to fall on it;—whilst I rushed

to

to him with all the swiftness imaginable—Hold, Sir!—I conjure you to lay aside your cruel design;—at the same time endeavouring, all I could, to wrest the sword from his hand.—No, Madam, cried he, never will I part with this friendly instrument, 'till you give me hopes of being more happy.—I cannot live without you, therefore 'twill be more kind in you to suffer me to pursue my present intention, than permit me to linger out a few miserable weeks longer.—He again pointed the sword to his breast, declaring nothing should now prevent his intention, unless I would consent to be his.

I was no longer able to support so terrifying a scene, and, giving a violent shriek, fainted away.—How long I remained in this shocking condition, I know not.—The first thing I perceived, on coming to myself, was my aunt, supporting Lady Moss, who appeared to be

in a manner very little different from that which I had just recovered.

Mr. Lucas was standing before me, holding a glass of water and a bottle of eau de luce.—The servants were all scattered round us, in a confused manner.—Roused at the dreadful prospect before me, I forgot my own unhappy situation; and, flying to the assistance of my aunt, who still supported Lady Mofs, I begged to know the cause of her disorder. When she pushed me from her with all the disdain imaginable, saying, Be gone, you ungracious girl! I insist on it you this moment leave me, norever dare to come into my presence, 'till you can learn to behave more suitable to my will. I am no stranger to the disorder you have occasioned, continued she, and though my heart is full of this worthy lady's sufferings, pointing to Lady Mofs, yet I cannot help telling you, I am equally as much concerned to hear of your insolent behaviour to the good Mr. Lucas, who merits, in every respect,

respect, your superior.--At this he bowed, and begged she would not condemn me, as he feared he had himself been greatly to blame, in his rash behaviour, saying, my cruelty had drove him almost to madness.

I stood, my Lavinia, like a poor criminal, trembling at the bar of justice; with this difference only, that the common privilege of speaking in my own defence was denied me; as my aunt, in an imperious tone, stamping her foot to the ground, ordered me once more from her presence.--I obeyed, and Mr. Lucas walked with me, begging I would forget what had happened. My trembling tongue prevented my saying one word, 'till we came to the door of the saloon; when I desired him, in a faltering voice, to leave me. Will you then, Madam, promise to forgive what is past? I hate myself for my over-hasty temper. I was silent. Speak but one word of comfort, Miss Somerset, said he, and I will be gone. I do, I do forgive you, stammered out

out your wretched trembling Meliora, hardly knowing what I said. Thank you, dear good Madam, he replied, and capered away, light as an *ignis fatuus*.

I had but just time to fling myself into a chair, before Mr. Heartfree entered the room.—Never was despair and horror more strongly painted, than in his countenance ;—he walked about in great disorder, frequently beating his head and stamping his feet to the ground ; then talking to himself like a madman, and looking wildly round him, he discovered me, when, starting as if he had seen a ghost, he reeled towards the door, which, not being quite shut, gave way, on resting his back against it ; so that he fell down a high flight of steps.—Never was surprise equal to mine at the variety of scenes I discovered.—However, I had not time for reflection,—I ran to him with all imaginable speed.—I found him senseless on the ground, and endeavoured to raise him, but had not strength.—I spoke frequently

frequently to him, but he was too far gone to answer me.—I screamed for assistance, yet all to no purpose, as no body was within hearing;—at last, putting my hand to his mouth, I could not discover he breathed.—More terrified now than before, I left him, and ran in pursuit of my aunt, whom I found just returning, with Lady Mofs leaning on her shoulder. I related, as well as my hurry would permit, the sad accident that had befallen Mr. Heartfree;—at hearing which they lifted up their hands and eyes, saying in a distressful tone, Where will our miseries end!—They were silent the rest of the way, 'till we came to that spot where the unhappy gentleman lay.—We found him in the same senseless manner as when I left him, and did every thing in our power to restore him.—At last he opened his eyes, and looking round with wild amazement—Where am I! pronounced he, in a tone of voice so dismal, that it pierced my heart.—Why, continued he, do you concern

concern yourselves about so miserable a being as myself?—Or why endeavour to disturb me from that sweet, tranquil repose I have been taking?—O! had I ever remained in that delightful slumber, how blessed should I have been!—I thought I was happy,—beyond description happy,—but now am I awaked to a thousand dreadful reflections.—O Mrs. Heartfree! Mrs. Heartfree!—Name not the vile woman, exclaimed lady Mofs:—I am shocked to the soul at thinking there is such a monster on the earth.—Abandoned wretch! who is a scandal and disgrace to her sex.—Though Lord Mofs had a thousand faults, yet I know she must have practised numberless arts to make him guilty of so flagrant a crime.—My aunt desired her to be calm. That is impossible, Miss Montague, whilst my wrongs and sufferings are so great.—By heaven and earth, replied Mr. Heartfree, as long as I have life, I will spare no pains to find the guilty pair,—and then

then should Lord Moss escape, without due punishment, say I am a coward, and deserve the correction. I would inflict on him.—He put his hand to his head in great agony; and, attempting to rise, fell backwards, saying, Ah! how is my poor brain disordered,—I fear I am incapable of forming a right resolution;—then, fetching a deep groan, he remained for some time speechless: whilst my heart was pierced at seeing his deplorable condition. At last, starting up, with the utmost fury in his looks—By the great God that made me, I cannot submit to remain tamely here.—Are the horses ready?—I will instantly be gone, and leave no spot unsearched, until I have found them.—So saying, he staggered the full length of himself, and must have fallen, had not Mr. Lucas caught him in his arms.

Judge, my Lavinia, how great my consternation and surprize at beholding this melancholy scene!—Though I now
found!

found out that Lord Moss and Mrs. Heartfree were eloped together, yet I was an entire stranger to the particulars of it, and could not help being greatly amazed, at their accomplishing a scheme of this kind at a time when they were out all together, and designed only taking a morning's ride.

Many servants were immediately dispatched to different quarters in pursuit of them.—Mr. Heartfree still talked wildly, and insisted on being permitted to follow them; but that was impossible, for, notwithstanding the agitation of his mind, he was likewise greatly bruised with his fall, which affected his head extremely, and rendered him incapable of walking alone:—he was, at length, helped into the bow parlour, and with much difficulty prevailed on to lay down on the sofa.—He appeared now too weak to say much, but his looks visibly betrayed the disorder of his mind.

Lady Moss, all this time, raved like a mad woman, uttering the most bitter invectives

vectives against the authors of her misfortunes.

My aunt joined with me in endeavouring to comfort her ;—for though I had, perhaps, too great reason to think she was not much my friend, yet, all things considered, she moved me to pity her unfortunate case ;—nor could I prevent a few silent drops from straggling down my cheeks,—which she, observing, said, with the utmost surprise—What do I see !—Is it possible Miss Somerset can have any compassion for my unhappy fate ?—I do indeed, Madam, replied I, sincerely commiserate both you and Mr. Heartfree.—I am obliged to you, answered she, though I thought you could not be thus tenderly affected for *me* alone.—Not at this time, Madam !—your *cases* being so similar !—We then took three or four turns up and down the room.—She at length grew a little composed, and talked to me with more affability, than I expected.

My

My aunt stepped out to give some necessary orders, and, on her return, I saw her look with some degree of astonishment at the unusual intimacy that appeared between us.

I have been told, my Lavinia, there are some tempers surprisngly mended by misfortunes ;—nor do I think it very unlikely, but I shall find this to be the disposition of Lady Moss.—If this should be the case, I flatter myself, I shall reap good out of evil.

Yours,

MELIORA SOMERSET.

L E T T E R V.

Miss SOMERSET in Continuation.

M. Castle.

I Arose this morning at six, and agreeable to my promise will proceed in my dismal narrative ;—but first let me tell

tell you, the good Lady Frankford is expected here in a few days ;—my heart leaps at the joyful thought ;—I hope, through her ladyship's friendly means, I shall then receive a letter from my dear Lavinia :—however, now let me go on.

Know then, poor Mr. Heartfree is extremely ill, and confined to his room, in a raging fever,—the best physician, this neighbourhood affords, attends him ;—his name is Wiseman, suitable enough to his profession ;—at present, he gives us but small hopes of a recovery, which I am very sorry for.

Lady Moss is, to all appearance, extremely well,—though she is greatly displeased, if any one ventures to tell her so.—She complains much,—and fancies herself really ill, saying her disorder preys dreadfully on her spirits ;—though, at times, she is as chearful as I ever remember to have seen her.—She likewise insists on Dr. Wiseman's visiting her, as regularly as he does Mr. Heartfree.--This
you

you may be assured he does not omit, though I can plainly perceive, notwithstanding the natural gravity of his phiz, he can scarcely help smiling at the farce he is carrying on, whilst she, with a solemnity of countenance hardly to be equalled, makes him acquainted with her imaginary complaints, and desires he would think of something speedily, that may relieve her, (as hers is not a disorder to be trifled with.)—On which he shakes his head and looks consequential for some time; saying, it is a complicated case, and must be taken into the most serious consideration.--Then, in a deliberate tone, he desired leave to feel her pulse, telling her at the same time, that could her ladyship submit to lose a little blood in both arms, it might be of infinite service to her; after which he would consider further what was to be done.—He would himself stay and see the operation.

Accordingly Mr. Wright, the surgeon, was sent for, on which she readily complied

plied with Doctor Wiseman's request, saying she should ever rely on his judgment, having frequently received great benefit by it.—The doctor bowed, and desired Mr. Wright to tie up her ladyship's arm, which he was about to do, extremely well, when she gave him such a charge to be careful, (telling him how much she dreaded it, and a thousand other things) which threw the poor man into such a tremor, that the lancet slipped, and we all thought he had cut the main artery of her arm.—This, my Lavinia, was the greatest shock we had yet received,—nor did I ever see my aunt so much alarmed before.—She even tore her hair for vexation. Lady Moss actually fainted away, when I, with more presence of mind, than is natural to me, recollecting an admirable styptic I had in my beaureau, ran up stairs to fetch it, and in my hurry opened by mistake the door of Lady Moss's apartment instead of my own.

But

But how, my Lavinia, was I surpris'd, at seeing a beautiful young creature on her knees, with her fine eyes (bedewed with tears) lifted up to the supreme being, in all the fervency imaginable!—She arose with great precipitation, and looking round her, in a confused manner, dropped me a curtsy, saying,—What ills, Madam, have I been innocently the cause of! I assured her I knew of none, at the same time apologising for my abrupt entrance.—Is it possible, continued she, you can be an inhabitant in this family, and be unacquainted with the great unhappiness I have occasioned? She sigh'd.—Indeed, Madam, said I, I am a stranger to it; and was I to judge from appearances, should be more inclined to think you would give pleasure, rather than uneasiness, wherever you came.

She bowed, saying, I find you are quite unacquainted with my misfortunes; then looking earnestly on me,—Can you, said she, acquaint me, if they have received
any

any intelligence of the vile Mrs. Heart-free? I told her, I believed not :—at length recollecting the situation I had left Lady Mofs in, I begged her to excuse me for a minute or two, when I would, if possible, return again; and hastening down stairs, with all imaginable speed, I had the pleasure of seeing Lady Mofs much better, nor was the artery of her arm cut as we at first imagined;—it was only the great fright Mr. Wright was in, which made him think it was so, as his hand shook to that degree, he could scarcely guide the lancet;—however, on farther examination, all proved well.

My thoughts were now entirely taken up about the young lady I had just seen, nor could I help wondering how she came there, and by what accident she appeared so interested in our family.—You may be assured, my curiosity to know this, was too great to let this first opportunity slip of paying her a visit.—I found her

rather more chearful, and meeting me at the door, she said, Madam, you are exceeding kind, in so soon visiting the chamber of distress.—She took me by the hand, and, with a manner inexpressibly graceful, led me to a seat.—She enquired very tenderly for my aunt and Lady Moss, and seemed very anxious about the welfare of Mr. Heartfree.

I gave her the best information I could to the many questions she was pleased to ask me, though my curiosity would not suffer me to be very minute, as I longed to know by what chance she became so well acquainted with every thing relative to our family.—She observed my impatience, and, with a sweet serenity almost peculiar to herself, said, I will no longer keep you in suspense.—I see, Madam, you are desirous of knowing by what means I came here.

My acquaintance in this family is of no longer a date than last Tuesday,—yet the many friendships I have in that short time experienced,

experienced, will ever make me esteem them the most valuable people living.— I could not, my Lavinia, help sighing, and silently wishing they would behave to me in the same manner,—whilst she continued with saying,

Know then, Madam, I have for some time been settled in an obscure village, in this neighbourhood, with a widow lady, who has three or four agreeable daughters, and with whom I thought myself very happily situated.—The greatest satisfaction I enjoyed was in a peaceful morning's walk, which I generally indulged myself in, whenever the weather would permit.—The young ladies of the family were frequently kind enough to accompany me, when nothing more material interfered; however, they were unluckily for me prevented, on Tuesday morning, by the arrival of a visitor just as we were setting out.

The weather was extremely fine, and unfortunately tempted me to walk rather

further than I at first intended.—The instant I had formed a resolution of returning home, rushed from the hedge a man with a mask over his face.—Judge, Madam, my surprize!—I have not words to describe the terror I was in, at beholding so formidable an enemy; and though I have met with a variety of misfortunes, yet I never stood more in need of a friend than at this instant, being greatly shocked at the brutality of his manner; when catching me in his arms, he was carrying me towards a horse which was fastened to a gate: I screamed all the way murder, and cried out in the most piercing tone imaginable for help. He endeavoured to stop my mouth, whilst I tore from his face the mask; by which means I had a perfect view of the most savage countenance I ever yet saw.

Enraged at having himself thus exposed, he now began to treat me with horrid familiarity; nor can I attempt to describe my distress, at being alone, and quite

quite undefended, with this brute. However, he could not tie up my mouth so effectually as to prevent my making a more hideous noise than before, which exasperated him extremely, and, with the utmost fury darting from his eyes, he threatened dreadful things, unless I would cease; still dragging me towards the horse, saying with a horrid oath, that my making any further resistance would signify nothing, as I was now quite in his power. But how happily was he in this mistaken? as at the same instant Lord Moss, hearing my distress, came galloping to my rescue, which as soon as the monster perceived, he quitted me, mounted his horse and rid off; but not without assuring me, with a disappointed, malicious grin, that this should not secure me from his vengeance.

As soon as Lord Moss came up to me, he kindly untied the handkerchief, that the villain had made use of to prevent my making a noise, and begged I would relate

to him all that had past ; which I did, as well as the disorder and hurry of my spirits would permit me.—He listened very attentively, and frequently expressed himself with great warmth against the scoundrel who dared thus to insult me.—Then observing, it happened very fortunately, that he had just parted from his company, in order to enjoy a more private ride ;—by which means my dismal cries had reached his ears, and had so luckily preserved me from a wretch, whose base views he should ever think himself happy in preventing.

I had but just time to tell him what a grateful sense I had, and should always entertain of his goodness, when we heard the noise of a carriage, and trampling of horses near at hand ;—on looking round, he discovered them to be the same he had a little before parted from ;—therefore, taking my hand, he genteely led me to the coach, which stopped immediately when we came in sight of it.

Guests,

Guess, Madam, the surprise the whole company was in, at seeing Lord Moss advance towards them;—leading me, whose disordered dress and manner too plainly testified the rough usage I had met with.

Lady Moss, I thought, at first, looked on her lord a little suspiciously; however, he soon removed all doubt, by relating the whole affair, and telling them how providentially he had been the means of my escaping from the worst of villains;—adding, he was so much exasperated against the wretch, who dared to attempt injuring so much innocence, that he was determined to pursue him.

It is impossible to tell you the many arguments which were made use of, to dissuade him from this resolution;—yet all to no purpose:—he seemed absolutely bent on finding him out;—and accordingly dispatched two of his servants different ways, that the wretch might not escape their search.—Mrs. Heartfree was

on horseback, and pretended to be very much concerned at what I had suffered.

The ladies advised her to come into the coach,—which she objected to, by saying—any thing of a flight always occasioned her a violent pain in her head; and that nothing but sleep would ever remove it;—therefore she would, if permitted, return home, and endeavour to compose herself.

Mr. Heartfree now joined the ladies, in pressing her again very earnestly to accept of a seat in the coach;—telling her, at the same time, they would shorten their ride, and go home immediately;—which she still positively declined, saying—she had much rather be on horseback;—and desired they would not think of returning with her, as she would not excuse herself, if she thought she was the cause of hastening them back a moment sooner than they otherwise intended.

Lord Mofs seemed to laugh at what she said, and, in a jocular manner, presented

presented her with a bottle of drops, telling her, they were excellent things to cure the spleen;—at which she made him no answer, but, taking a slight leave of the rest of the company, she instantly set out, as we imagined, to return home; attended only by one servant, which was Lord Moss's, as he had genteely offered him to her, for that purpose.

Lord Moss now came to the coach door, and making a polite bow, told Mr. Heartfree, he would leave the ladies in his care, and looking earnestly on me, said—he was determined to pursue his first intention of following the villain.—I again entreated him not to think of it, telling him the servants would in all probability discover him.—The ladies likewise joined in petitioning him to stay with them, but all in vain:—he left us, saying he hoped to return soon, and entertain us with his adventure.

The ladies now placed me between them, and desired I would be very particular, in recounting all that had happened to me, which you may be assured I did in the best manner I was capable of, whilst they expressed great pleasure at my being so happily preserved :---I then told them I was very apprehensive, from his last words, that, if he should escape Lord Mofs's search, he might afterwards pursue me still farther; nor could I sufficiently guard against the many villainous stratagems he might make use of, to get me a second time in his power, when I should expect no mercy.---Miss Montague, with great goodness, desired me to be easy, assuring me I should remain a close prisoner at her house; nor would she suffer me to return again to Mrs. Stapleton's, 'till they had discovered something of him; but in the mean time would dispatch a servant, with a letter to acquaint her of my welfare.

It

It is for this reason, Madam, I am confined in the manner you now see me ; ---nor shall I have resolution enough to venture out ;---at this she paused, as if waiting for my answer.---I thanked her for the obliging confidence she had placed in me, and assuring her I was, 'till now, an entire stranger to all she had been relating, as neither my aunt nor Lady Moss had ever given me the most distant hint of her being in the house.

I congratulated her on her lucky escape, at the same time saying, I hoped her troubles were entirely over.

At this she looked stedfastly on me, and fetching a deep sigh, said,---That, Madam is impossible,---my distresses are of such a nature, that time will rather aggravate, than alleviate my grief.--- You shall, continued she, at a proper season, be acquainted with my unhappy history ;---at present I have no spirits to relate it.

At mentioning this, the tears trickled down her lovely cheeks, whilst I begged her to be composed.---Mortifying reflection! exclaimed she, that the wicked Mrs. Heartfree should so basely take advantage of my distress, and under the specious pretence of a violent fright and head-ach, instead of going home, should that instant make an elopement with Lord Moss.

On our arrival here, the first question Miss Montague asked, was after the welfare of Mrs. Heartfree; at which the servants all looked surprised, declaring they had not seen her.

Lady Moss was in an instant alarmed, and without making any answer, flew directly up stairs, from whence she soon came down; and, with a countenance filled with horror, said,---It is but too true. She is not there, but fled I fear with Lord Moss.---It is all a vile contrivance between them.---I have long suspected it;---yet feared to reveal what I thought.

thought.---She then asked, if William, the servant, that attended on her, was returned?---But he likewise had not made his appearance.

At this instant Mr. Heartfree came in, and with a chearful look welcomed us home;---nor did he seem to observe the surprise and terror, which appeared in every one's countenance.---Turning to the maid-servant, who was standing by, he affectionately inquired for his wife, saying, Don't let her be disturbed;---I hope she will soon recover.

Ah, Sir! replied Miss Montague in a distressful tone, we should have been more cautious.---She has, I fear, taken an effectual method to disturb her peace for ever.---At hearing this, he stared wildly, when his impatience to speak almost choaked him.

Lady Moss then screamed out, The vile woman is certainly eloped with my wicked Lord.---At which Miss Montague related to him their suspicions.---I trembled

trembled to see the agitation he was in.--- He walked up and down the room in a dreadful passion, and could not, in his first hurry, help uttering very severe expressions indeed, calling for curses on them both. ---Then he would more calmly whisper to himself,---It cannot be!---It is all a mistake!---She could not act so basely!---At length, beating his head, he heartily blamed his own credulity.---Talk not at that idle rate, Sir, replied Lady Moss;---had they now been prevented, they would certainly have taken some other opportunity of carrying their wicked scheme into execution,---as this, take my word for it, is a premeditated affair.

If you thought so, why had you not been more on your guard? answered Mr. Heartfree.---On which Lady Moss gave way to a violent passion, saying,---Am I, Sir, to be blamed for the wicked conduct?---here she stopped, and turning pale, sunk back in her chair.---Miss Montague assisted in helping her into
the

the garden.---Mr. Heartfree left the room, declaring he would instantly pursue them.---I then retired to this apartment, with a heart but too much oppressed at the miserable scenes I had been witness to.

Here, my Lavinia, the lovely girl concluded;---I was all thankfulness for her obliging account, but under a necessity of hastening away, left my aunt should discover where I had been.

She accompanied me to the door, saying, May I hope, Madam, for the favor of seeing you often? I cannot express how much you have relieved me by this kind visit.

I assured her I would not omit waiting on her every opportunity; though I was under the disagreeable task of telling her, it must be by stealth, as my aunt had not thought proper to acquaint me of her being here.

I own to you, my Lavinia, I am greatly charmed with this fair unknown.---

She

She does not seem to be more than eighteen—her complexion is lovely, beyond description—her eyes blue and shining—her nose aquiline—her teeth white and even—then as for her lips, they exceed——

I can go no farther.—I know you will laugh at this awkward account I have already given.—Be it so, Lavinia, it will be no more than what will deservedly be bestowed on your

MELIORA SOMERSET.

LETTER VI.

Miss KNIGHTLY to Miss SOMERSET.

Knightly-Court.

WITH what inexpressible pleasure do I embrace this opportunity of writing to my charming Meliora! An indulgence I should have despaired of, had not your worthy friend, Lady Frank-

ford, sent me your packet, which I read with trembling impatience; whilst my dear mother joined with me in exclaiming against the cruelty of your aunt and Lady Moss.—Ah! Lavinia, continued the good woman—I, that have known her from a child, want no proof to convince me how undeserving she is of this severe treatment.

Sir Thomas Watts came in at this instant, and knowing how deeply he is interested in every thing that concerns you, I made no scruple of relating to him all that had past.—He heartily sympathised with us in commiserating your misfortunes;—yet, my aimable girl, let me advise you, by all means, to keep up your spirits;—a time may, and I doubt not will, come, when you will be able to surmount all difficulties, and triumph in your turn.

A month is lapsed since the marriage of your sister, in which time I have only seen her once;—she has taken the title
of

of Lady Obrian *Rueful*, and, believe me, her looks but too well correspond with her name.

I was one morning visiting Lady Easy, when Sir Peter *Rueful* and his Lady dropped in by chance ;—the sight of me did not, I believe, add to the pleasure of their visit ;—nothing but the most distant complaisance passed between us.

Sir Peter placed himself directly opposite to me, which afforded me an opportunity of taking a more perfect view of his person, than I ever did before,—and, disagreeable as it is, yet there is something in his face (if I understand any thing of physiognomy) that, I am inclined to think, indicates a mind still more odious than his outward form ; but as I do not pretend to much skill of this kind, I may perhaps be mistaken.

Mr. Padstow is, to our very great surprise, returned from abroad, and has been some time with us.—The first thing he inquired after, was your welfare.—

I was

I was silent. He again repeated the question.—I could not, my dear girl, bear the disagreeable thoughts of mortifying him at once, by relating the unhappy scenes, which had past in his absence,—therefore endeavoured to wave the discourse;—when looking at me with great impatience, why, said he, Miss Knightly, do you trifle with me in this manner? How can you delight to keep me in this cruel suspense?—Is Miss Meliora Somerset still at Herbert-Hall? If so, I will hasten to her immediately.—He was going; I was obliged to stop him, with promises of telling him all that had happened,—which I did in the most gentle manner;—but when speaking of the sufferings you had met with on his account, his manly eyes plainly discovered how much his heart was touched, and turning from me, Say no more, Miss Knightly, upon my soul I cannot bear it: on which he drew towards the window, and sobbed aloud. My mother

ther at this instant entered the room; he had not yet seen her;—she spoke to him with all the affection of a parent, whilst he taking his handkerchief from his pocket, applied it to his eyes, then embraced her with reverence.

My mother looked on him, then on me, as if surprised. I told her what had been our conversation; her eyes glistened, which he observing, said, For God's sake, dear Madam, do not let my disordered mind distress you.

Though I always esteemed Miss Somerset, as the most lovely of her sex, yet the consideration of my youth and circumstances prevented my then encouraging any other passion for her, than as that of a brother; but the many years I have been absent, has proved so amazingly successful, that I have, for some time, entertained very different sentiments, and flattered myself, the proposals I can now make, would not be objected to by her friends;—which induced,

duced me to write to Mr. Somerset, having at that time not heard of his death, and acquainted him, in a very particular manner, with every thing relating to myself, and scrupled not to own the sincere passion I entertained for his amiable daughter; to whom I took the liberty of inclosing a letter at the same time, and begged, if it met with his approbation, he would deliver it to her: but not receiving any answer, I was at last resolved to visit England.

O! my Meliora, could you have seen how sorrowful he looked, at pronouncing these words, your heart, I think, must have been deeply affected: I assure you mine was; though I used all possible means to comfort him. But, alas! in a few days after, he was taken extremely ill, and has kept his bed. However, we are now in hopes he is something better. I have frequently assured him you never received or heard any thing of his letters, and told him, I
doubted

doubted not but they fell into your sister's hands. This I dare say is the case, which accounts for your being sent for in so great a hurry, the last time we saw you at Knightly-Court.

He seems at times to be a little pacified, which inclines me to think my arguments have some effect upon him. He often speaks with the greatest affection of his sister, and says he expects her here soon, having sent abroad for her. You know she has received her education in a nunnery, and I hear she is a very accomplished girl; but I do not know whether she is there now, or with her cousin Blane, in France, as Mr. Padstow says he has not seen her these eight months.

The good Sir Thomas, to use your own words, has been a constant attendant on Mr. Padstow, and there seems to be a friendship taking firm root between them.

Sir Thomas improves in my mother's good opinion daily;—she is continually expressing

expressing the great regard she has for him, and the pleasure she reaps from his engaging conversation; observing, that his sentiments correspond exactly with her own. I really believe she knows no distinction in her regard between us.

Was then my Meliora at peace, what a happy creature would her Lavinia be! Frequently do we join in wishing you with us; whilst every purling rivulet presents to my mind some pleasing remembrance of my lovely girl.

I am almost afraid to ask you, whether you have seen Mr. Foxchace, or not. I imagine you have, as I hear he has been absent from Blear-Hall for some time, and gave out, that he was going to M--- Castle; which he said he should have visited much sooner, had he not been prevented by a fall from his horse, which bruised him in a terrible manner. This was told me by Mr. Hutchings, who, I find, is one of his bottle companions,
and

and whom I could not look on with the least civility after I knew it.

I hope you will always find means to prevent an union with such a detested monster: the very thought of its being otherwise, chills my blood, and almost stops my pen from proceeding;---yet why should I fear?---merit, like yours, will some time or other be rewarded.

Sir Thomas continually presses me to fix a day for our union, which he is pleased to say will be the happiest of life. My mother is equally solicitous with himself, and insists on its being delayed no longer than 'till the arrival of my brother, who is expected from his travels very soon. I suppose she intends he shall officiate as father, knowing the great affection that has ever subsisted between us; and yet, my friend, I have never wrote him a syllable of the matter. He will, I am sure, be pleased with it, when once he is acquainted with the goodness of Sir Thomas's heart.

The

The melancholy account you gave me of poor Mr. Heartfree, shocks me much. I am equally desirous with yourself of knowing the history of the charming stranger. I likewise wish to be acquainted with the real character of your other paramour Mr. Lucas---surely never any body before had two more disagreeable suitors.

I would have you take a world of care when you see Lord Freeman, or, I am apt to think, he will make your heart beat a very different tune from what it has hitherto done with your affectionate

LAVINIA KNIGHTLY.

LETTER VII.

Miss SOMERSET to Miss KNIGHTLY.

M. Castle.

THE good Lady Frankford is at last come, and has brought my charming girl's letter. But why do you

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distress

me so much, by relating your sufferings on my account? Ah! my friend! what an unfortunate creature am I, to give a moment's pain to the best heart in the world! If you would endeavour to contribute to my happiness, you must instantly resolve to shake off that heavy melancholy, which I fear is stealing on you, and which I should never forgive myself, for being the cause of. I could not prevent an involuntary tear, at perceiving none of those sprightly sallies, which once used to adorn your excellent epistles. Was I the most miserable wretch on earth, I could not bear my friend should be so great a sharer in my misfortunes, as to lose her amiable vivacity.

How can you suffer the worthy Sir Thomas to press so ardently for the happy day?---Why talk of your good mother's insisting on its being delayed no longer than till the arrival of your brother?

ther? Why not at once consent to bestow your hand where, I am certain, your heart has, for a long, very long time, been deservedly fixed? How do I wish myself with you! What would I not say, to forward an union which promises, on all sides, such lasting happiness? Let me entreat you to talk no longer of waiting for your brother. Delays are too frequently attended with dangers and unforeseen difficulties.

I shall be heartily rejoiced to hear of the safe arrival of Miss Padstow. Though I have not the pleasure of knowing her; yet I have been often told, she is a most charming sprightly girl.

Believe me, I greatly pity poor Mr. Padstow. How cruel was it of my sister to make so wrong a use of his well intended letters! Had she considered the affection my father always expressed for him, I think she could not have treated him so basely. Yet, my Lavinia, why

could I think the contrary, considering her behaviour to me?

I am much concerned at the account you have given me of Sir Peter Rueful and his Lady; I begin to imagine she already repents what she has done,---else, I fear your skill in physiognomy will prove true.---But, let me drop this subject, and hasten to tell you what I am sure will give you pleasure.

You are to know then, that my aunt's behaviour has been so kind to me, ever since the arrival of Lady Frankford, that I begin to think myself quite another creature, and should entertain the pleasing hope of seeing you once more, was it not for Mr. Padstow's being with you; who I am certain they will take care I shall avoid: but why should they torment themselves with groundless suspicions? I am sure, my regard for him is no more than a sisterly one, which may be somewhat natural; the intimacy that subsisted between us when children

confid-

considered. However, enough of this, and

Now, Lavinia, give me leave to facilitate myself on the escape of Mr. Foxchace;---I flatter myself it is even so, having seen nothing of him here. I think I can write his name with a tolerable degree of patience. O! my friend! should I be really rid of him,---what inexpressible pleasure will it give me!

Mr. Lucas is here frequently;---his behaviour is rather mended. Poor Mr. Heartfree is better, and intends, as soon as he is perfectly recovered, setting out in pursuit of the travellers, who, we have heard, were seen together on their road to France.

Lady Moss sees very little company,---complains much of being indisposed, and confines herself chiefly to her dressing-room, with miss Stepney, which I have learned is the name of the beautiful stranger. A summons to dinner. Adieu.

Monday Morning.

After the liberty I have taken of chiding my lovely girl, ought I, my Lavinia, to be displeased with your friendly caution? I mean, with regard to Lord Freeman : no indeed, I am not ; I think it was a very necessary one, considering the great character Lady Frankford has just been giving me of him ; and you know every thing she says has great weight with me. Sir Harry extols him to the skies ; all his friends seem to vye with each other, who shall be most loud in his praises. Some one taps at my door,---who can it be ? I must lay aside my letter.

Well, Lavinia, what strange things do come to pass ! It was no other than my aunt, with a look full of kindness, come to tell me, she expected company at dinner, for which reason, she would have me dressed to the best advantage. You may be assured this obliging behaviour quite startled me ; she even descended

descended to sit down in my apartment, and entered into a *tête-à-tête* conversation with great affability; a favor, she never honoured me with before. At last rising from her seat, she went to my drawers, and took out my pink and silver negligee, saying, I would have you, Meliora, wear this to day; then stepping to her dressing-room, she soon returned with a beautiful pair of *coque de pearl* earrings, and presented them to me, in such an affectionate manner, that I was quite at a loss for words to express the surprize I felt at this unusual treatment; which she observing, said to me,---Learn once to be a dutiful girl, and follow the advice of your friends, you shall have no longer reason to complain of my severity:---but your own obstinacy, Meliora, has hitherto prevented my treating you with that kindness I otherwise intended.

I took her hand, and pressed it to my lips, saying---I want, dear Madam, but in one thing, a will of my own. And

that one thing answered she, looking a little displeased, will, in all probability, be your ruin.

Let me entreat you, Madam, continued I, not to judge so cruelly of me. Believe me, I will this moment enter into the most solemn engagement, never to be married contrary to your approbation, or my sister's, if you will be kind enough not to force my inclinations.

We can enter into no such agreement, replied she, in an angry tone; and looking sternly on me, said, if you are blind to your own interest, that is no reason we should be so too. You have now two very advantageous offers; therefore I insist on it you come to a speedy determination, and let me know which of them you most approve of, as I am resolved no longer to be trifled with in this childish manner. I turned from her,---the tears started from my eyes.

She bid me immediately prepare to dress myself, and to consider seriously
of

of all she had said; on which she left me to ruminate.

However, my Lavinia, I am not quite miserable, as I hope Foxchace has, of himself, dropped all thoughts of me; and should I be so lucky as to escape Mr. Lucas, which I do not absolutely despair of---what a happy creature will, once more, your Meliora be?---I could scribble for ever on this delightful thought, but time will not permit me to say more. Adieu.

I had not, my Lavinia, quite finished my dress, before Lady Frankford entered my room with a pleasure in her countenance very visible.

I made her a low curtesy, and thanked her for the civility she honoured me with in seeking my apartment.---She seemed not to regard what I said, but, fixing her eyes stedfastly on me, told me with a smile, I see how it is, do not blush, Meliora, I guess who you are preparing for: ---Well! well! it is just as I would have

it. I came with no other design than to desire you would equip yourself to the best advantage, and now, my dear girl, you have spared me the trouble;---but how you should get intelligence of his being here, is to me amazing.

I stared, my Lavinia, with astonishment at every word her Ladyship pronounced; nor could I, for sometime, guess her meaning, till laughing aloud, she said, Pardon me, Meliora, I own I cannot help being a little merry at your feigned ignorance. And so, my dear, you actually pretend not to know that Lord Freeman is now in the bow parlour, with my Lord and Master. Then turning me round, and viewing me from head to foot: Come, said she, it is mighty well, ---I shall be mistaken if you do not do wonders to day.

I was such a fool, Lavinia, that I trembled so, I could scarcely stand, and would have given any thing to have been excused going down. She, observing my confusion,

confusion, said very good naturedly, I perceive, my charming girl, you are a little confounded, at being thus detected; therefore, out of common compassion, I will say no more.

Will your Ladyship then, I replied, be kind enough to hear what I have got to say in my own defence?---Yes, provided you will say it quickly,---besides, Sir Harry, is a sort of stranger:---I have not seen him before for these three days; and when you have got so good a husband as I have, Meliora, you will think it a long time to be so long parted. This she said with an arch smile, which made her look perfectly lovely.

I now related to her the whole behaviour of my aunt, and shewed her likewise the present she had just made me, which surprised her extremely, as she said this was not the company expected, for their visit she knew to be a sudden one;---however, she was much pleased, it happened at this time; and taking me

by the hand, led me down stairs, saying, Pluck up your spirits, Meliora---something tells me, all will yet be well.

We were now got to the parlour door, which I am sure I should not have had courage to open, without my kind friend's assistance. I had not advanced two steps into the room, before I was covered with the most awkward confusion I ever experienced, and should have thought myself happy could I have retired undiscovered to my dressing-room. ---Never was a situation more disagreeable than mine,---angry with myself, for appearing so embarrassed, I knew not how to behave.

Sir Harry politely met me at the door, and, taking my hand from his Lady, introduced Lord Freeman to me, who paid his compliments in a manner so peculiarly elegant to himself, that I cannot pretend to give you a description of it;---nor, indeed, would the confusion I was then in admit of my making any particular

cular observations; only, that I thought report had fallen very short of him, as he seemed, in every thing, to deserve more than there is a possibility of representing. Believe me, my Lavinia, I never appeared so insignificant in my own eyes as I did at this instant. Sir Harry still held my trembling hand and led me to a sofa at the head of the room; then, seating himself by me, he entered into an agreeable, easy conversation, which soon helped to dispel my embarrassment. At last, addressing himself to Lady Frankford, I look on this young lady's acquaintance as a valuable acquisition, and cannot help being secretly pleased at the advantages we shall reap from our fortunate intimacy with two such deserving people ;---he bowed to me, then to Lord Freeman, who in return paid him a most polite compliment, and said, he was so much indebted for the great civilities he had received from all his friends in this neighbourhood, that he believed

believed it would not be in his power, for some time, to quit a place he so deservedly admired.---At this, he sighed.---Ah! my Lavinia, what should occasion it? Is it possible so good a man should be unhappy?

My aunt soon after entered the room. I had now more leisure to observe his graceful address, and never before, my Lavinia, saw any thing so inexpressibly pleasing. He speaks but little,---then, what he says is so much to the purpose, and delivered in such a genteel manner, that it never fails drawing the attention of the whole company. His person is amazingly fine, and, I assure you, requires a much more able pen than mine to give you the least idea of it; therefore, I will not do him so great a piece of injustice as to attempt it.---His voice too, Lavinia, is harmonious beyond description; this, you know, is a perfection, I always highly admired.

After

After this slight sketch of so accomplished a man, will not my dear girl fear for me?---Yes, I know she will---I think I see her now laying down my letter, and shaking her head gravely over it, saying,---Ah! my Meliora, what I much suspected is come to pass.---No, indeed, my Lavinia, not so neither, I shall not be so soon captivated, though a Lord Freeman should attempt it:---but had I not been thus explicit, you would perhaps have imagined, I was grown more reserved on your caution.

I suppose you will now ask, what occasioned all that flutter, at my first entering the room? Nothing I assure you, but the fear of being suspected by the good Lady Frankford, whom I so tenderly regard, that I cannot bear she should think me capable of deceiving her, even in a joke. This, my Lavinia, was the only reason, believe me.

After some little conversation, my aunt beckoned me towards her, and ordered
me

me to step to the library, for the new prints she some time ago purchased, to amuse the gentlemen till dinner, saying nothing of her expecting other company.

I soon executed her commands,---and then left them to contemplate over their several beauties, whilst I hastened up stairs to tell my Lavinia all that passes in the heart of her truly affectionate

MELIORA SOMERSET.

L E T T E R VIII.

Miss SOMERSET in Continuation,

M. Castle.

AT the conclusion of my letter, I flattered myself with much happiness;---but lo! it was all imaginary.---Alas! how soon was I undeceived! and given to know it was no other than the vile Foxchace I was dressed to receive.---Yes, Lavinia, he has indeed been here.

I met

I met him in the hall, as I was going to execute some orders my aunt had just given me.

I started at seeing him, whilst he advanced towards me and muttered out something like an apology, for not waiting on me before: my fright prevented my hearing distinctly what he said, and turning from him, I was hastening back again to the company; when he stopped me, by saying, I see, Madam, the sight of me has surpris'd you, nor do I wonder at it, considering your behaviour to me at our last meeting; but to shew you, I am not fond of repeating what is past; by my soul, I will forget it, if you will promise to be more kind in future. I looked on him, I believe, rather disdainfully,--saying, you may forget, Sir, but assure yourself, I never shall.

I could not help speaking this with great warmth. Had I not reason for it, Lavinia? To find myself a second time
subject

subject to the addresses of this hateful wretch, when I just began to flatter myself I had entirely escaped him.

He paid but little attention to what I said, but turning from me, gave two or three whistles, in the huntsman's strain, which instantly brought in a parcel of dogs, that fawned, frisked and jumped about him many times, whilst he stroked them on the head, and talked in a language quite unintelligible to me. This insolent treatment put me out of all patience, and made me at once determine to suffer my aunt's highest displeasure, rather than remain any longer, alone, with such an indelicate monster.

I was going, when he instantly quitted his fellow brutes and ran towards me, saying, Do not, Madam, leave me, and in anger too. I looked on him with the utmost scorn, declaring at the same time, the whole world should not keep me with such an animal, who had only the mere form of a man to distinguish him from his canine:

canine companions. Could you have seen how horrible he looked, at my pronouncing these last words; you would I am sure, have shuddered for me: indeed I trembled at beholding the fury of his countenance, whilst he muttered, as if talking to himself, such things, as I should be shocked to repeat. I was again going, but was again prevented by his taking hold of my hand. I could not help shrieking out at his touching me, which instantly brought two of his favourites to defend him, when, jumping towards me, they caught hold of my ruffe, and tore it in pieces. At this he pretended to be displeased, and turned them out in disgrace, though not without saying, with a shocking oath, that there was a great deal of gratitude to be learned from those poor, faithful animals. Then, I presume, you are pleased with their behaviour, replied I--I really think they are the fittest company for you, and would advise you to follow them.

I was,

I was hastening away to avoid his answer, when coming up to me, with a countenance more savage than I can describe, he said, By heaven and earth, Madam, this treatment is not to be borne, nor will I any longer submit to it, unless you this instant tell me your reason for using me so different from the rest of the world.---Have I not, Madam, in every action merited your regard ?---And give me leave to tell you, had you half as much gratitude as poor, honest Cæsar, here, (pointing to one of his dogs) you would gladly own it. Hold your peace Sir, I cried, I will no longer suffer myself to be thus compared. Here I stopped, my Lavinia ; I had not spirits to proceed. Beginning a little to soften, he said, I cannot hold my peace ;---No, Miss Somerset, notwithstanding your cruelty it is impossible for me to be silent when with you, whom I sincerely love: though I have used all my endeavours to conquer a passion, which you have hitherto given

given me such little hopes of succeeding in, yet I still continue to prefer you to the whole world. My estate, Madam, is two thousand pounds a year; I will settle half of it upon you, and shall think myself happy in taking you without one penny of fortune. This proposal I have already made to your sister, who approves much of it, so does your aunt; and the devil is in it if they should not: for, notwithstanding you are a very fine woman, yet give me leave to tell you, these offers are not to be met with every day; therefore, let me advise you not to think too highly of yourself: take my word for it, you will never meet with any thing more advantageous than what I now propose; nor indeed did I ever think of being made such a fool of myself, but you are so cursed handsome, that there is no guarding against your bewitching charms. Hold, Sir, I replied, and be assured, this is the last time I will ever punish myself by listening to discourse like

like this ; therefore, I insist on it, that you now hear me once for all : and the first thing I have to desire, is, that you no longer harbour a thought concerning me, as I would this moment prefer a dungeon, where I should be confined on bread and water, rather than suffer myself to partake of your two thousand a year at Blear-hall. I likewise despise the artful method you pursue, in offering to accept me without a fortune. You may perhaps think to blind the world, by making them believe, this offer proceeds from your great generosity ; but I am not unacquainted with the real motive which inclines you to act in this manner.

I know you are mean enough to imagine, my sister would not be prevailed on to favour you by any other method than this you have made use of, well knowing how far I am in her power : but, believe me, not the utmost cruelty that I can receive, shall ever oblige me to be guilty of so dishonorable a deed, as tamely

ly to listen to the hated addresses of a person I can never think of favouring. And I must, Sir, tell you frankly that you are, of all others, my aversion. So saying, I left him.—Rage and anger darted from his eyes, whilst passion seemed to strike him dumb.

On my return to the company, Lady Frankford observed my disorder; nor did my aunt appear at all surpris'd, when I told her who I had met with in the hall;—which convinced me at once, that it was him alone she expected at dinner; and that I was thus gaudily dressed to receive. She arose hastily from her seat, and said, she would go and welcome Mr. Foxchace to M--- Castle, and then beg the favour of him to make one among us.

In the mean time, I withdrew to the farthest end of the room, and related to Lady Frankford all that had past between us; and, notwithstanding Sir Harry was entertaining him with a droll account

count of his canvassing a certain borough, and recounting the many odd adventures he met with; yet Lord Freeman still looked towards us, with such an anxious kind of inquisitiveness, that I could not help begging his pardon for the liberty I had taken, in so long claiming the attention of Lady Frankford. Rather suffer me, Madam, answered he, to apologize for my impertinence, in appearing to attend to a conversation which was not directed to me, and must only serve to make you imagine I am too desirous of satisfying an idle curiosity; a thing which I have always condemned, but I had my reasons for acting contradictory in this. He looked stedfastly, and sighed.

What, my Lavinia, could he mean? My aunt, I believe, prevented his saying more, by coming in the same instant, introducing Foxchace, who was not quite recovered from the disorder I had occasioned him.

Sir

Sir Harry and Lord Freeman could not help smiling at his awkward address; my aunt too I thought a little ashamed of him; which I was ill-natured enough, secretly to enjoy.

Lady Frankford was for a long time quite silent, fearing to speak lest he should answer her in a manner suitable to his appearance. Mr. Foxchace had not been long seated, before he resumed his favorite topic, and entertained us with an account of the unlucky fall he met with one morning, in his return from fox-hunting, which confined him, he said, to his bed for three weeks, and, during that time, he believed never a poor Devil was in a worse condition; nay, he was so ill, that it had almost made him forswear ever more to seek the destruction of those poor animals, he had for a course of years delighted to torment. And yet, continued he, how soon are the promises of a sick bed forgotten! For I was no sooner recovered, but I

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found

found myself more desirous than ever of returning to my favourite pursuit. And upon my word, I cannot, even now, help looking on that time as lost, which does not present me with some sort of chace.

Yesterday morning I was very lucky; not out, by Jupiter, more than three hours, when I was at the death of two of the finest foxes I ever beheld, and earthed a third; this was sport indeed---damme, was it.

So saying, he arose, and went out, but soon returned with a great bag in his hand, out of which he shook the two stinking foxes, and laying them at my feet, daubed the carpet very much, which he endeavoured to clean, by rubbing his dirty boot on it.

My aunt could not help colouring when she saw how much her handsome carpet was like to suffer, and speaking to him in a manner which shew'd she did not like this kind of behaviour, and de-

desired he would immediately take them away, and assured him the smell was very disagreeable to her, and she was certain it must be so to Lady Frankford, and the rest of the company. The smell offensive to you! Madam, repeated the brute, how is that possible! when, in my opinion, they are the sweetest creatures in the universe; however I will not offend you, by suffering them to remain here; on which he opened the door, and called Cæsar, who instantly made his appearance, and taking them up, one at a time, carried them out, and then returned, as if expecting to be rewarded by his kind master for this piece of service, who patted him on the head, and ordered him to lye down by his side, saying at the same time, this is an honest, faithful animal, that scarcely ever quitted me during my confinement; since which, to reward his fidelity, I always take him with me, nor do I suffer him to leave me at night, but

make him sleep in one corner of my room.

My aunt at this looked greatly confounded, which I observed with pleasure, in hopes she would no longer blame me for disliking him. She arose and was going out, as if to hide her confusion, when the wretch begged her permission to have the foxes nailed against the coach-house door, telling her, it always afforded him great satisfaction to look at them. She coolly consented to this request, and retired. He soon followed to give orders for its being done, saying, at Blear Hall his out-houses were covered with his own spoils.

He was no sooner gone than the good company made up for their long silence. Lady Frankland declared, she was afraid of him, and coming up to me, very affectionately took my hand, saying, with a look of sweet compassion, I really feel for, and pity my dear girl: yet don't be cast down, as I flatter myself, after this behaviour,

behaviour, your aunt will not speak another word in his favour. This I wish, replied Sir Harry, and I'll beg the favour of your aunt to let us have the pleasure of your company for some time, at Frankford-house; and there, Madam, you may be assured of never being disturbed with the unmannerly voice of Foxchace.

I thanked him most cordially, but could not, my Lavinia, help sighing. Why that sigh, Miss Somerset? continued he; I hope a visit of this kind would not be disagreeable to you. I assured him, the sigh was occasioned by no other motive than the fear lest my aunt should not comply with his obliging request. Lady Frankford kindly seconded him, and then whispered me to observe how vastly desirous of this Lord Freeman appeared to be, and said, you must not be surprized at the attention he seems to pay you. He is no stranger

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to your History, for I have made him acquainted with the whole of it.

I now felt my face all of a glow, and was terribly confounded; nor could I, my Lavinia, for a long time after direct my eyes towards him. Yet I cannot, and ought not to be displeased with my amiable friend, being well assured, whatever she said was with an intention to serve me. I am only afraid what Lord Freeman will think of it. And yet, my Lavinia, you will ask me, why I should regard this? I answer, for no other reason, than because he is esteemed to be so good a man; therefore I would wish, not to be thought meanly of by him.

I do not know how it is, my friend, but I feel myself more unhappy at this instant than I ever did before; I am full of perplexities, doubts, and fears; I believe I must lay aside my letter, and examine my own perverse heart, and yet I fear this will only add to my uneasiness; but why should I complain? Every one has
his

his troubles ; even the good Lord Freeman, I fear, does not escape ; as he appears at times, my Lavinia, rather absent and melancholy ; and tho' he has a great command over himself, yet, in spite of his caution, a sigh sometimes escapes him. I wish much to be acquainted with the cause, but blame myself for desiring to know what would not be in my power to relieve. Perhaps 'tis occasioned by his absence from some favourite fair ; if that is the case, you will ask, what prevents his returning to her ? May she not have a morose father, or uncle, or guardian, that will not consent to their union ? and yet, they must be morose indeed that can make any objections to so good a man. I only wish you could see him ; I am sure you would then be greatly prejudiced in his favour. Lord bless me ! to what length am I running ! I'll not say another word, but that I am your

Unhappy friend

MELIORA SOMERSET.

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LETTER IX.

Miss KNIGHTLY to Miss SOMERSET.

Knightly Court.

I Dread to tell my dear Meliora, what has happen'd since I writ last. Oh! my lovely friend, how, in that short interval, is the pleasing face of all things changed, and our boasted tranquillity totally vanished!

My brother, that used to give pleasure wherever he came, is returned. How joyfully did I run to welcome him home! whilst his open arms were extended to receive me. My mother was just behind me, which as soon as he perceived, he fell on his knees. She was too deeply affected at the sight of him to utter one word, but lifted up her eyes in silent thankfulness, whilst she pressed his hand
to

to her lips, and bedewed it with her tears.

We were all mute for some time, nor did I ever feel a more pleasing satisfaction than that this moving scene afforded me. At length, my mother, recovering herself a little, Can I, said she, be thankful enough to the Almighty, that I live to see this joyful day; that I once more behold my dear children together? taking each of our hands, and pressing them with parental affection. Now may I say, continued the good woman, I am completely blessed; then looking around her, but where, said she, is my third favourite? I cannot bear that he should be absent from this scene of general joy to my family. My brother desired to know who that was; my mother said, your old school-fellow Sir Thomas Watts. He pretended not to remember any such person, and I thought looked on me a little displeased.

H 5.

I felt

I felt my face glow, and turned towards the window, in order to conceal it.—My mother repeated, Not remember him!—I am much surprized at that.—However, my son, I am sure you will be glad to recollect him, when you know his worth: to which he made her no reply;—but coming towards me with a kind of half smile, said, Is he a favourite of your's too, Lavinia?—This was spoken in so inquisitive and dissatisfied a tone of voice, that I was too much surprized to answer him immediately.—My mother, at this instant, was called out of the room.—He seemed no longer to wait for my reply, but turned from me in a careless manner, and hummed a tune: then looking at the paintings, he asked whose picture that was, next mine; I answered, the gentleman's my mother has just been speaking of.—Ah! Lavinia, continued he, there is more in this than I am aware of: why will

will you not satisfy me by answering my first question?—Indeed, brother, I have no objection to answer any question you shall propose. He smiled, and said, you used to be an honest girl, Lavinia, and I own I should be much concerned to find you less candid now than usual.

I had no design, my friend, but to make him speedily acquainted with the whole affair, tho' I think it too delicate and serious a subject to be mentioned so abruptly. I only wanted to bring it round to him, and therefore said to him, Do you think it possible for my mother to entertain so high an opinion of Sir Thomas Watts, and for me not to esteem him?—Very well, Lavinia, I am answered, he said, and am greatly pleased to find you put it on the footing of esteem, as the difference between that and love is very great indeed, and am well convinced, had it been otherwise, you would have made me acquainted with it, before my

return, on which I should have acted very different from what I have now done.

O! my Meliora, I began to fear I had trifled with him too long, and was now determined no longer to regard form or ceremony, but tell him at once the firm engagement I was under to Sir Thomas, and likewise to tell him, how greatly I preferred him to all others.

I had no sooner formed this resolution, than I was prevented putting it in execution by the sudden entrance of my mother, who appeared in the greatest disorder imaginable, saying, very incoherently, Miss Padstow is fled from France; and, notwithstanding the strictest search has been made after her, she is no where to be found.

Thunderstruck at this intelligence, my brother went out to examine the messengers, who were arrived with those dreadful tidings, but all to no purpose; he could learn nothing that would afford us the least satisfaction.---In the mean

mean time, I stole up stairs, in hopes to prevent its reaching the ears of the unhappy Mr. Padstow, who was still very weak; but how unfortunate did every thing happen!---He had just heard of the arrival of my brother, and was, by the help of Sir Thomas, coming down stairs to welcome his safe return, the first time he has attempted quitting his apartment, since his confinement; when unluckily he heard the melancholy news, which sounded almost in every corner of the house.---He soon took the alarm; and when I entered his room, I found him in a more deplorable condition than I have words to describe.---He was stretched on the floor, in all the bitter agonies of grief; I tremble at recollecting the shocking scene.

Sir Thomas used his utmost endeavours to calm his troubled soul.---But alas! my friend, grief alone had taken possession

possession of him, and rendered him deaf to all that was said.

He talked of nothing but his unhappy sister,---frequently starting, and crying out in a dismal manner---Perhaps she is this instant in the hands of some cruel ravisher.---Then after a short pause---O! what vile artifice must have been practised on her!---I am certain she would not voluntarily be guilty of the least imprudence, for she was always an amiable and well-disposed girl, and so diffident of her own judgement, that she could not be prevailed on to take the most trifling step, without first consulting her friends.---Now perhaps she is a poor, ruined, dishonoured wretch---dreadful thought!---By heaven I cannot support it.---Yet, what shall I do!---I am too weak to think of going in pursuit of her myself.

Sir Thomas again begged him to be composed, and endeavoured to lift him on the bed, which he performed with

great difficulty: when looking round, they both perceived me, who was fixed like a statue against the door; the shock I received from this melancholy scene being too much for me, and for some time deprived me of speech, as well as motion.

As soon as Mr. Padstow discovered me, he lifted up both his hands, saying--Ah! Miss Knightly, why have you left your happy brother to find out such a miserable object as you now behold?--Oh! Madam, I have no comfort left--I had once a sister--a lovely sister--but--alas!--she is--Here he fetched a dreadful groan, and sunk motionless on his pillow.--

On my mother's entering the room, I saw she was greatly affected, nor could she prevent a few *saline drops* from stealing down her venerable cheeks, saying, at the same time,--How little did I expect to have this joyful day so horribly over-clouded!

Mr,

Mr. Padstow soon after grew delirious, during which, he frequently mentioned you, my friend, which plainly discovered from whence the first source of his melancholy arose.---However, I shall forbear telling you what he said, as I think it would affect a heart more impenetrable than I take my Meliora's to be; and perhaps reduce you to the same deplorable situation, in which our friend then lay.---And though Sir Thomas could with difficulty support himself, yet he would by no means be prevailed on to leave his friend.

On our return to the parlour we recounted to my brother all that had happened, at which he appeared greatly concerned, and said, he should think himself happy, was it in his power to assist the worthy Mr. Padstow, for whom he had ever the most exalted regard.

Then coming towards me, he said, Dry up your eyes, my Lavinia, I cannot

cannot bear to see you so afflicted.---Nothing, I replied, but the deep distress of my friend, should have occasioned this sorrow, on a day I would wish to set apart from all others, for joy and festivity.---The day which presents us with your safe return, ought ever to be remembered with pleasure; therefore, I am unexpressibly concerned that any unhappy event should have interfered at this time to damp our joys.

You affect me too much, my lovely sister, by dwelling so long on this mournful subject; therefore let me intreat you to banish these gloomy ideas, and look forward on more pleasing scenes, which may yet come to pass.

I have brought from abroad, continued he, a young gentleman, to whom I am under numberless obligations, and have invited him to dine with me this day, and would therefore have my Lavinia appear to the best advantage:--
then

then addressing himself to my mother,-- and you, Madam, I hope, after you are acquainted with his merit, will not hesitate to own he is your third favourite, in preference to any other.

I shall ever, my son, replied the good woman, respect those that are kind to either of you.--I assure you, Madam, said my brother, I owe the preservation of my life to the Chevalier de Guidrarde, the gentleman I am now speaking of, and much fear it will never be in my power to make a proper return for the many other favours I have received from him.

My mother assured him, nothing should be wanting on her part, to convince the Chevalier how gratefully she acknowledged his kind care of one who had ever been very deservedly dear to her;---and begged to know by what accident he had been the happy means of preserving a life which
was

was of the utmost consequence to her tranquillity.

My brother waved answering this particular.---Between you and I, my friend, I am apt to think his travels have not much improved him.

The Chevalier made his appearance just as we had done speaking of him,---and I must do him the justice to say, he is the most elegant, graceful figure I ever beheld; and his polite address and conversation bespeak him in every thing to be a well-bred gentleman.---My brother ran with open arms to receive him;--my mother met him at the door, and kindly welcomed him to Knightly Court.---My brother, then, civilly introduced him to me; --but I had none of those tremblings, *Meliora*, which you so prettily describe on your first sight of Lord Freeman.---No; I received him with all the composure imaginable.---Soon after, Sir Thomas entered the room, who, in his usual agreeable

agreeable manner, said he was just come to shake Mr. Knightly by the hand, and welcome his safe return.---But, O! my friend, how reserved and cool was my brother's behaviour to him! then it was, *Meliora*, my heart went pit-a-pat.---Sir Thomas seemed not to observe it, and sat down with much good nature, and joined in the conversation:---but my brother looked the whole time, as if dissatisfied: my mother perceived it; I saw she was uneasy, and, by a thousand obliging ways, endeavoured to screen his unpolite behaviour.

I was so much embarrassed at this ungenteel and unexpected treatment, that I was constrained to leave the room: Sir Thomas soon followed me, saying, the return of your brother gives me more pleasure than I can express; as I hope my happiness will now be complete, which will be impossible, till I am secure of my only treasure.---He pressed my hand to his lips—how ardently

dently do I wish to call it mine! therefore, dear Miss Knightly, name, without reserve, the earliest day, to make it so.

I could not, my Meliora, help sighing, whilst he, in the most gentle manner, begged to know the cause, saying, with the utmost tenderness, For heaven's sake, make no more excuses;---I was in hopes, the only obstacle was now removed, by the happy arrival of your brother.

A summons to dinner prevented my then answering him: the rest of the day passed on tolerably well.---Sir Thomas was kind enough to devote the greatest part of his time to poor Mr. Padstow.---The Chevalier and my brother walked a considerable time together in the garden---I could observe them from the window, deeply engaged in conversation, nor did he leave us till late in the evening, during which he made himself extremely agreeable; and had I not
been

been prepossessed with certain fears, I should have enjoyed his company much.

My mother desired him to look on her house as his home, during his stay, which, I believe, he has promised to accept of;---I wish it had not been so, but her gratitude is such, she imagines she can never do enough to requite his kindness to my brother, who appeared delighted with the civility she had shewn his friend, and requested to know her opinion of him as soon as he was gone.

He is, said she, a very amiable companion, and his kind behaviour to you has prejudiced me greatly in his favour. At this answer he looked highly pleased, and made her a low bow, saying it was the very thing he wished; then, turning to me, But what says my Lavinia? Why should she be silent, at a time when I should rejoice to hear her launch out in the praise
of

of my friend?---You must excuse me, brother; it is a rule with me, not to judge too precipitately of any one; therefore it would be wrong to give my opinion at first sight.

Well, Lavinia, that's answering like a good honest girl: I esteem you much for it.---So, you must have a second interview with him--never fear, I dare say you will see him soon again, as I believe he has left that behind him (putting his hand to his heart) which will not suffer him to remain in peace when absent from this house.---To be sure, replied I, it is evident, he is more happy in your company than any other; or, why should he leave his native country to associate with you?---At this, he looked archly on me, saying, Are you, Lavinia, really so ignorant as you pretend to be, or is it only put on?---Brothers, indeed, are excellent cloaks, where sisters are in view.---I assure you, I don't under-
stand

stand what you mean, answered I; and you must speak more intelligibly before I can give you a reasonable answer.--- Why then, Lavinia, I would have you understand that the Chevalier likes you beyond all the women he ever saw, and is determined to pay his addresses to you in a very sincere manner; which, I assure you, gives me inexpressible pleasure, as he is the man, of all others, whom I should have wished you for a partner, could I have taken my choice of the whole world.--- He is, I know, exactly calculated to render you perfectly happy.---His fortune is very considerable, yet that falls extremely short of the many great and good qualities he is possessed of.

I don't, in the least, doubt, replied I, but he is very deserving of all you have said of him; and believe me, I will ever behave to him as the friend of my brother: and that, be assured, is the utmost I can promise;

as

as my affections have been (with the permission of my mother) a long time fixed on Sir Thomas Watts ; nor can the whole world prevail on me to alter them.

He looked at me much displeased, saying, Pray, Miss Knightly, why was I not before made acquainted with this?---For no other reason, brother, but to surprize you (as I hoped) agreeably on your return.

He walked up and down in a great passion, assuring me it would never meet with his approbation.---My mother desired him to be easy, telling him, it was sufficient that she approved of it.---He was going to answer her, when a servant whispered him, somebody desired to speak with him.---He instantly went out, giving me such an angry look as I never received from him before; and pulling fast the door after him with great violence, made the whole room shake, and threw down

a handsome piece of ornamental china, which stood on one of the brackets.

My mother lifted up both her hands, saying, she was much concerned to find his temper so altered; and looking stedfastly on me, I observed her eyes glistered.---My heart was swollen to a monstrous size, and seemed as if too large for my bosom to contain it.---This was the first time I had ever received from him the least unkind look; nor can I describe to you the pain it gave me.

Sir Thomas came in soon after:---he observed our gloom; yet looked unwilling to ask the cause.---I thought, my *Meliora*, he never appeared more amiable than at this instant; nor did I, till now, feel how firmly he was riveted in my affections.

My brother returned;---went to the bureau, and took out some papers;---he looked fullen and thoughtful.---I
fear

fear he is meditating something that will not add to my satisfaction.

How came you, my friend, to have so much foresight?---Often have I read over that letter of yours, wherein you advised me not to wait his coming home;---but who could imagine he would have acted so differently from his usual behaviour?

I have run to such a length on my own unhappy affairs that I have not had time to say one word concerning yours: however, my *Meliora*, I hope there are happier days in store for us both than the present seem to be.

I this moment hear the voice of my brother, enquiring after me.---I will hasten to know his commands, though not without first assuring my dear girl, I am her faithful friend

Harriot Knightly.

LETTER X.

Miss SOMERSET to Miss KNIGHTLY.

M. Castle.

O! Lavinia, I am greatly surprized and concerned at the behaviour of your brother.---But I must learn not to wonder at any thing; as the amazing changes which every day present themselves to my view, fill me with dread, and make me shudder at my own apprehensions: therefore I will endeavour to shake off this timidity, lest it should in time be immoveably fixed, and banish from my breast all pleasing hope.----Should this be the case, what a dreary prospect shall I have before me! not to be blessed with one chearful ray, to dispel the many
one

gloomy clouds, which are continually gathering round me.

Your account of the unhappy Mr. Padstow is really deplorable; nor could I help bedewing the paper with my tears at reading it.---Lady Frankford came into my room, and observed my eyes were red and swollen.---No bad news, I hope, my Meliora?---Pray how does your friend?---Has she converted the name of Knightly into that of Watts?---And are you paying a gentle tear, at resigning her to one who has a superior right?---I sighed, and held her out your melancholy letter to read; had I attempted to speak, I should have fobbed aloud.

I saw her gentle heart soon sympathized with mine, and giving me the letter again,---I cannot, said she, proceed, my eyes will betray me;---I will look it over when I have more time to indulge reflexion than the present

I 3 will

will admit of.---Dry your eyes, my good girl,---you must endeavour to be more chearful.---Sir Harry has called on purpose for you to take an airing with him:---your aunt at first opposed it, but he would not be disappointed, and at last prevailed; though I don't know what to make of this wonderful officiousness. Don't you think I shall be half jealous?---She smiled, and left the room, saying, Hasten to dress yourself with all expedition.---I believe I shall accompany you.

I soon put on my Brunswick habit, and followed her.---When I came down, Sir Harry was all impatience, and seemed to chide my laziness, telling me he had waited an hour; though on looking at his watch, he found he had been about three quarters mistaken. ---Lady Frankford laughed, saying, You must not be surprized, Meliora; he used to serve me in the same manner;---though no one is longer setting
out

out than himself, yet he will not allow other people a proper time.----- He smiled, and thanked her, saying, You have given Miss Somerset a pretty character of me : however, I am too complaisant to contradict you ; therefore will own it to be true.---That's a good, honest confession, Sir Harry, replied her Ladyship ; and I would advise you to rise so early every morning, as you did this, since it makes you so ready to acknowledge your faults.

In this good-natured manner did they rally each other, till we were told the horses were ready ; when Sir Harry very politely took his Lady in one hand, and your Meliora in the other, and led us out.---My aunt was settling some accounts with her house-keeper, which prevented my seeing her.

We had not rode far, before Sir Harry asked us where we would choose to go?---I told him it was a matter of indifference to me, as I knew

very little of the country. Since that's the case, replied Lady Frankford, let us go and see Mr. Allen's new house: this was readily agreed to.

Sir Harry, Lavinia, is a very agreeable companion, and was extremely entertaining the whole way;---nor would any thing else, but the company of this worthy pair, have relieved me from the great anxiety your epistle had occasioned me.

I am so angry with your brother, that I am sure, was I to see him, I could not help chiding him.---You know we always took the liberty of reproving each other, whenever we saw occasion; and I would give him to understand, that I had not quite forgot the good old rule.

Sir Harry, in our way to Mr. Allen's, asked me if I was an admirer of fine paintings, telling me I should now see a most beautiful collection; adding, it was an amusement he was par-

particularly fond of.---Now I have been told, Lavinia, he is an exceeding good judge, and that many of those handsome pieces at Frankford House, are his own performance; but this did not come from himself.

On our arrival at Mr. Allen's, you may be assured we did not omit seeing every thing that was curious:---and after we had amused ourselves for some time in the house, we at length stroled into the gardens.---But judge, Lavinia, our surprize at beholding, in a solitary arbour, Lord Freeman; he was resting his head on his hand in a pensive manner;---nor did he perceive us, till we were advanced pretty near to him; ---when starting, as if ashamed to be caught in so indolent a manner, he immediately arose and came towards us, bowing respectfully to Lady Frankford and myself; then, politely shaking Sir Harry's hand, he expressed himself in very genteel terms at this lucky un-

expected meeting, and afterwards told us he came to pay Mr. Allen a visit; but not finding him at home, he had been stroling round the gardens, till he had almost tired himself:---he said he had just been thinking on Sir Harry, and wishing to shew him a beautiful shrub, which he was certain he would greatly admire.

Whilst the gentlemen walked round to make their observations on this and other curious exotics, Lady Frankford and myself retired to that seat Lord Freeman had quitted; when, looking down, I perceived, just by my side, a pocket book.---Lady Frankford saw it at the same instant, and catching it up,---This, said she, undoubtedly belongs to Lord Freeman; and now, Meliora, we will punish him for his carelessness, and make him, for a short time, believe it is lost: so saying, she was covering it over with her handkerchief, when out dropped the

most beautiful picture of a woman I ever beheld.—Blame not our curiosity, Lavinia;—we were both of the wrong sex to withstand such a temptation.—We did not immediately replace it in the book, but indulged ourselves a few moments in admiring it, when Lord Freeman returned in a great hurry in pursuit of it.—Lady Frankford laughed, and told him the innocent scheme we had formed of surprizing him, and by what accident the lovely picture fell into our hands.—He looked confused, and could not prevent a rising sigh.

Sir Harry soon after joined us, nor did he spare his friend one jot on this adventure, but said, If the original was equal to the picture, he admired his choice, and wondered how he could be so long absent from her.—Then looking at me, This, Miss Somerset, said he, is a beautiful painting we knew nothing of,

when we were discoursing of the many valuable ones we should see in this house.

Lady Frankford now returned it to Lord Freeman with the book, apologizing at the same time for the liberty she had taken.—He affected to smile, and endeavoured to wave the discourse, yet could not help glancing his eye sometimes tenderly on the picture, and sighing.

This, my Lavinia, is certainly some favourite lady,—and, if I am not much deceived, I think I have seen somebody that it resembles, but cannot recollect who it is.—I wish he was not quite so reserved with respect to his own affairs; I should then be able to speak to him with more freedom, and may hope, in time, to know something of his history.

He was so obliging as to accompany us back to dinner. Just as we had got within the avenue, my horse capered,

capered, and rearing up, I fell from the saddle.—Lord Freeman instantly dismounted and caught me in his arms, even before I found myself touch the ground, which prevented my receiving any injury; however, I had not courage to mount my horse again; and as it was but a little way to the house, I chose rather to walk.—Lord Freeman walked with me, during which he told me what Lady Frankford had before observed to me, that he was no stranger to my whole history, which had occasioned him to behave in the manner I have already described to my Lavinia on his first visit to M. Castle; assuring me at the same time he would omit nothing that was in his power to contribute to my happiness.—He talked in this kind, friendly way, till we got home.—I thanked him in the best manner I could, for the civility he honoured me with.—He bowed, and, sighing, said, I have been
too

too unhappy myself, Miss Somerset, not to feel for the distresses of others. —He was going on, when my aunt came out to meet us, telling me she was greatly concerned to hear of the accident I had met with:—I assured her I was very well, and had not received the least injury from my fall.—I cannot say but I was at first a little vexed at her ill-timed kindness, though afterwards I could not help being secretly pleased at this new mark of her affection, which was more than I ever received from her before, and at any other time it would have given me the greatest satisfaction;—but now, I wanted to hear what Lord Freeman intended to have said.

I am greatly concerned that so good a man should have ever met with any troubles;—how little does he deserve them!—yet, what a happy art he has of concealing his distresses!—for in company, he does all he can to render himself

himself agreeable, by endeavouring to contribute to the felicity and enjoyment of others.—I have not time to enlarge on this subject, but will proceed to tell you every minute circumstance as it occurs to me.

Lady Moss is better, and dined below stairs to-day for the first time this fortnight, which gave me an opportunity of visiting Miss Stepney, in her apartment; and as I had not time before dinner to change my dress, it served as a good excuse to retire immediately afterwards.

As soon as Miss Stepney heard me in the gallery, she opened the door, and advanced towards me, saying, Do I once more see the amiable Miss Somerset!—a favour I had almost despaired of. Ah! Madam, replied I, nothing but the close confinement of Lady Moss should have prevented our having more frequent interviews.—I then told her, I hoped she was now
secure

secure from the hands of her vile persecutor, and would soon be able to venture down stairs with safety.—Solitude, continued she, best suits my present situation;—yet I will in every thing be guided by the good friends I have so providentially met with here.—Miss Montague, I find, was so obliging as to send immediately on my arrival, to acquaint Mrs. Stapleton and her daughters of my safety.—I have just received a letter from the old lady, kindly congratulating me on my lucky escape from the hands of the odious ruffian; she likewise tells me nothing should have prevented their coming to see me, but their fears, lest he might, by that means, make a discovery of my happy asylum.—Somebody coming softly up stairs, hindered our having any further conversation for that time.—I repaired to my dressing-room with all expedition, and was glad to find it no other than Lady Frankford, who

who had stolen up to acquaint me that Mr. Lucas and his sisters were below; but pray, Meliora, said she, where was you flying to in such a hurry?—I then made no scruple to acquaint her with every particular I knew relating to Miss Stepney.—I am very impatient to see her, replied she, and you must contrive me a sight of that lady, which I promised her as faithfully as I could.

Yes, Lavinia, I shall with pleasure, if it is in my power, introduce Miss Stepney to the valuable acquaintance of my worthy friend.—I am more desirous than ever of knowing her history, and am in fear that some hidden grief preys on her spirits.

I have scribbled so fast that I know not what I have said, but I must hasten to the company; but how shall I receive them! Mr. Lucas there too, Lavinia, what shall I do?—My aunt is greatly inclined to favour him:
—Lady

—Lady Mofs speaks of him with the highest esteem ; nor is Lady Frankford so much averse to him as she used to be.—He certainly appears to a great advantage after the uncouth Foxchace, who ? live in dreadful apprehensions of seeing every moment, as he is only gone to spend a day or two with an acquaintance in this neighbourhood.—I know not what to do ; they are both my aversion.—Pray, Lavinia, pray for

Your disconsolate friend,

MELIORA SOMERSET.

LETTER XI.

Miss KNIGHTLY to Miss SOMERSET.

Knightly-Court.

HOW incapable am I of comforting my lovely Meliora ! What can I say to lessen your distress ? How gladly would I fly to your relief ! but, alas !
that

that pleasure is denied me, and all others, I fear, are fled far from your distressed Lavinia.

My brother still remains thoughtful, and dissatisfied: he called me just now into the parlour, and for a few minutes talked of indifferent things;—Then looking stedfastly on me, he paused, and shook his head, and turned towards the window in disorder, muttering to himself—inconsiderate girl!—I pretended not to understand him, and affectionately asked him, if he was indisposed?—He did not answer me for some time;—at last, turning towards me, Yes, indeed I am, and ever shall be so, whilst my mind continues in this unhappy state.—O! Lavinia, why would you think of engaging yourself before my return?—How frequently have I dwelt on your praises to the Chevalier!—How have I flattered myself with the agreeable hope, that our friendship would be still more durable

durable by the firmer tie of brother !—What hopes did I not build on thinking I should one day have it in my power to present him with a wife that would be an honour to me, and a comfort to him ! Inexpressible pleasure have I frequently received from this happy reflexion.—Excuse my interrupting you, brother, said I, How could you think of answering for me, before you was acquainted with my sentiments ?—I relied, Lavinia, entirely on your generosity, as firmly believing, had you favoured any body's addresses in particular, you would have been ingenuous enough immediately to have discovered it to me ; but as you never gave me, in any of your letters, the least hint of it ; and being so well assured of the merit of the Chevalier, I thought it was impossible for any woman to refuse him, and imagined after you had seen and conversed with him, you would then thank me for the valuable present I had brought you. I

I make no doubt, brother, but the Chevalier is a very valuable man, and, believe me, I sincerely wish him happy.—I fear that's impossible, Lavinia, now he has seen you; on which he flung me a letter, There, read that, and judge his opinion of you.

I took it up, and returned it to him, saying, You must excuse me, brother; I cannot submit to hear what another says, whilst my heart is so deeply engaged to Sir Thomas Watts.—He looked at me very angrily, and said, Why then, Madam, did you not tell me so immediately on my return, that I might have prevented the Chevalier from seeing you?—He stamped his foot to the ground.—What difficulties have I not innocently drawn on my friend!—My peace of mind, Lavinia, is at stake; therefore, if you have the least regard remaining for me, you must abate some part of your punctilio; you must consent to hear every thing
the

the Chevalier has to say to you :—from your own mouth let him be informed of your engagement.—He again held out the letter, saying, in a milder manner, Come, Lavinia, let me entreat you to look at the contents of this.—Don't tempt me, brother.—I should be unworthy the regard of Sir Thomas Watts, was I capable of acting as you would have me; though I am inclined to think your request is designed only to try me, being convinced you would despise my meanness if I accepted your offer.

He walked up and down in a hurry, saying, How happy should I be to hear you speak thus firmly in the interest of the Chevalier !—I expect him here every minute, therefore I must desire you to prepare to receive him.—Most willingly, brother, as your friend, but in no other capacity.

He quitted the room in a great passion, calling me obstinate girl.—I
5 followed

followed him, in hopes of softening his resentment, but was prevented by my mother: she was just returned from visiting Mr. Padstow, who fancies himself so amazingly recovered, that he intends setting out to-morrow morning in pursuit of his sister.—Yet, Meliora, I think him very unfit to take such a journey, being very weak still; but all my persuasions avail nothing: he says his life will be burthenome to him till he has some account of her, and is determined to visit his cousin Blane in France, to know the particulars of her escape.—I fear the journey will too much fatigue him, and should it prove a fruitless one, I tremble at the effects it may produce.—Sir Thomas talks of accompanying him to London.

My poor mother, Meliora, is greatly concerned at my brother's behaviour.—She said to me just now, weeping, Ah! my Lavinia, should you be
blessed

bleſſed with ever ſo large a family, ſuffer none of them to go out of England for an education : could I have foreſeen the conſequence, your brother ſhould never have travelled. What pain did it not occaſion me to part with him ! Yet the pleaſing hopes of ſeeing him return improved, kept up my ſpirits in the miſt of all my concern at his abſence.

I begged her to be eaſy ; telling her, I doubted not but my brother would ſoon be convinced of his error :—I can plainly perceive Sir Thomas is grieved ; he is not, *Meliora*, as he uſed to be ; his agreeable ſprightlineſs ſeems to have forſaken him ; he affects to be chearful ; but, alas ! it does not fit on him with that eaſe which uſed to accompany his natural gaiety.—Some one taps at my door, Farewell.

'Twas my mother, good woman ! She came to tell me ſhe had made the ſame obſervation of Sir Thomas ;—ſhe told me he was alone in the parlour, and
order-

ordered me to go to him.—You may be assured I did not disobey her; I went down with all expedition, and found Sir Thomas in a very pensive manner, sitting with his back towards the door: he held something in his hand, which he was looking at with great attention, then pressed it to his lips, and breathed out, dear Lavinia!—I peeped over his shoulder, and saw it was a ring, in which was curiously interwoven a lock of my hair: I was not displeased, Meliora, at this discovery, only a little confounded at hearing him utter so many kind affectionate things of your friend. Ah! Sir! thought I, how partial are you?—How unworthy am I of all this?—I had not courage to speak to him, therefore was about to retire unperceived, when I heard him mention the name of my brother, saying, Cruel Mr. Knightly! Why does he endeavour to torment me with suspicions that are so injurious to my peace? Lavinia, I am sure, is all

goodness ; she never could have given to the Chevalier the most distant hopes.—I could no longer remain silent, but screamed out, God forbid I should be capable of acting so basely.

He hearing this, started as from a dream ; and, running towards me, led me trembling to a chair.—Indeed, Meliora, I was much frightened ; a thousand disagreeable ideas intruded at once on my mind ; however Sir Thomas was too good to keep me long in suspense ; he kindly seated himself by me ; and then related the whole conversation that had passed between my brother and him ; and though he endeavoured to soften every word with the utmost tenderness, yet it was impossible for me to prevent a tear from falling down my cheek.—Ah ! my charming friend, what pain shall I feel at losing the affection of a brother, who used to be so dear to me ! Yet it must be so, as he has positively told Sir Thomas, he never will consent

to our union; and I am determined, not any thing in the whole world shall ever tempt me to be another's;—tho' my brother has been base enough (I am sorry to add so harsh an epithet to any thing he says or does) to tell him, he does not doubt but I shall very shortly think more favourably of the Chevalier, than I ever did of him, and therefore advises him to act like a man of spirit, and no longer suffer himself to be misled, by harbouring the least tender thought concerning me.—Was ever any thing more disingenuous, and mean, than such a behaviour? 'Tis evident he was mistaken in Sir Thomas's understanding, and thought he had met with a man much his inferior, but his noble and gentleman-like behaviour, on this occasion, soon convinced him of the contrary.—I omit giving you the particulars of their conversation, as I should blush to see in what a scandalous light my brother, whom I ever, till now,

so affectionately regarded, would appear. —Sir Thomas would shine, as I should ever wish him, but not at the expence of a person so nearly allied to me. —Cruel man! what can he mean by this ungenteel usage? I hope it will not reach the ear of my mother; I fear she would never forgive him: though you know it is not in his power to hinder my marrying the man I like, if it meets my mother's approbation, and I am very certain she never will be prevailed on to alter her good opinion of Sir Thomas, unless he himself should give her cause; and that I am persuaded will never be the case.

The arrival of company obliges me once more to bid you adieu.

I am come up again, for a moment, to tell you, Sir Thomas says, he cannot conveniently accompany Mr. Padstow, unless he will stay with us a few days longer, as he should be very unhappy to leave me in this situation, and
not

not knowing what formidable schemes may be plotting for me at this time.

Surely, my friend, he appears more amiable and deserving every time I see him.—Ah! cruel brother, how are you changed! One sigh, *Meliora*, and then I must hasten down to Miss Field, Miss Osmond, and Miss Hart, whom I have just left; they are all as chatty as ever, and failed not to ask for my charming girl, whose happiness, be assured, will ever be dear to the peace of her truly

affectionate, tho' distressed,

LAVINIA KNIGHTLY.

LETTER XII.

Miss SOMERSET to Miss KNIGHTLY.

M. Castle.

I AM certain my amiable friend will not chide me for this long silence,

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when

when I have told her how well I have been employed.

You are to know, then, Lavinia, I have discovered the lovely Miss Stepney to be no other than Miss Padstow: my heart exults at the pleasure it will give her good brother;—fly to him with the happy news, which I hope he will hear time enough to prevent his going in search of her;—tell him she is safe at M. Castle.—I am in such spirits I scarce know what I write—but that I am, and ever shall be, with great affection,

Your faithful

MELIORA SOMERSET.

LETTER XIII.

Miss SOMERSET in Continuation.

M. Castle.

FINDING myself a little more composed, I will now endeavour to acquaint

acquaint my Lavinia with the particulars of this lucky discovery.

First then let me tell you, Lady Moss begins to fancy herself much better, and attributes it to a salutary airing she takes every morning with my aunt, during which time the counterfeit Miss Stepney and myself failed not to be together; nor did I ever see her without being more and more pleased with her.—I one day pressed her very earnestly to give me some account of herself.—She looked at me, and sighed, saying, You perplex me much, Miss Somerset; but I find it a difficult task to refuse you, though my misfortunes are of so distressed a nature, that I fear it will not be in your power to hear them, without being touched with pity for the unhappy sufferer you now behold.—Tears for a few minutes stopped her further utterance: during this interval of her grief, I did all in my power to comfort her.—At last, casting her eyes

on me, Ah ! Madam, how ineffectual are all your kind endeavours !—I have something here, putting her hand to her heart, which is immoveably fixed : Yes, said she, (softly speaking to herself) his dear idea is too firmly stamped on my memory, for the power of time to erase it.—To-morrow, Miss Somerset, you shall know the cause of my disorder ; till when, I will endeavour to compose and recollect my unhappy scattered thoughts.—The return of my aunt, and Lady Moss, prevented her saying more.

After I had left her, I could not help giving way to a thousand mournful reflexions on her account ; nor did I ever wish for any thing more ardently than the arrival of the next day.—But I was unluckily then prevented from hearing what I so much desired to know, by the unexpected arrival of some company, which hindered the ladies from taking their usual airing.—This, my Lavinia, was a sad disappointment to me, as I had
not

not even the pleasure of communicating my thoughts to my friend Lady Frankford, who was gone with a party to Oxford: her setting out was a sudden scheme; it was proposed by Sir Harry in the evening, and, in compliance to his will, she agreed to accompany him the next morning. Miss Lucas, Lord Freeman, and Mr. Buckland, are of the party.—Miss Lucy Lucas is indisposed, and gone to H. for change of air.—Sir Harry and Lady Frankford were so obliging as to ask my aunt to let me make one amongst them, but to no purpose; she would by no means comply with their request; yet told them, when she herself went thither, I should accompany her; till that time I must be content to stay at home: this I am not sorry for, as things turn out.—But, not to detain you with any more trifles, know then, I no sooner found myself alone, than I again flew to the apartment of the lovely prisoner, whom I found in tears.

—No new cause of grief, I hope, Madam? asked your inquisitive friend.—She sighed, and said, No, Miss Somerset: was I to tell you the reason, you would probably blame me; indeed I should be angry with myself, at any other time, for indulging a weakness I cannot at present account for.—I have slept but little to-night, and during that time my imagination was full of disagreeable ideas.—I thought I saw a person who was extremely dear to me, in the agonies of death.—My brother too, good man! presented himself to my view, and seemed full of trouble and anxiety on my account; but when I told him all my sufferings, and implored his aid, he turned from me, as if unwilling to assist me; then started, and could not, at first, believe I was his sister, till I convinced him by this large scar on my arm, which he gave me when a child;—I thought at this discovery he smiled with his usual affection, and began to tell me

me where he had been to seek me; when I awoke, trembling all over, and so much terrified, that I have not since been able to close my eyes.—My spirits at present are so weak, that it has brought to my mind a thousand melancholy reflexions.—I know, Madam, you will condemn me for being so superstitious, as to take any notice of those idle ridiculous dreams; but I assure you it has made a deeper impression on me, than I am at once able to shake off.—She again sighed, and looked down; then, after a short pause, continued:—My brother is a worthy, valuable man, and I should be very ungrateful, and unnatural, did I not esteem him with great tenderness and affection; yet there was one in the world still dearer to me; but I am for ever unhappily deprived of him.—Here she stopped, and with her handkerchief wiped the briny drops from her eyes;—then, looking stedfastly on me, she sunk back in her chair.—You

may be assured, my Lavinia, I was greatly alarmed, and endeavoured to comfort her all I could; but she appeared quite insensible to what I said, and clasping her hands together, lifted up her fine eyes, filled with the utmost expression, saying, Ah! my husband! my ever dear husband!—These words, my friend, seemed to escape her involuntarily, she therefore tried to recal them; whilst her delicate frame shook with confusion at what she had uttered.—I was amazed at hearing it, and having no other desire but to serve her, begged her to place a confidence in me, which I assured her should never be abused.—At length recovering herself a little, she said to me, I want no fresh assurances of your sincerity, Miss Somerset; but I have now communicated that to you, which I firmly vowed never to divulge till a proper time.—It was for this reason I assumed the fictitious name of Stepney, though my original one was Padstow.

stow.—Never, I believe, my Lavinia, was astonishment equal to mine, on her mentioning this well known name:—I ran to her in an extasy of joy, and throwing my arms round her neck, said, Let me embrace my lovely friend:—Yes, I will forever call you by that tender name.—And is it possible?—Do I really see Miss Padstow?—That, replied she, with a sigh, was once my name; though I greatly fear, Madam, I am not so happy as to be known to you, having been in France ever since the death of my father, which happened when I was but eight years old.—This circumstance alone convinces me you are the very same whose loss we have all so much lamented.—She took my hand and pressed it to her lips, saying, Have you been kind enough to mourn for the unfortunate Maria Padstow?—Indeed, I have, and am now inexpressibly rejoiced, that it is in my power to serve you.—She looked on me in silent thankfulness, whilst I
took

took from my pocket your letter, which brought me the melancholy news of her escape.—This, said I, contains an account of your brother's being at Knightly Court.—Thank God! thank God! interrupted she.—What do I hear?—Am I awake?—and are these happy tidings really true?—Ah, Madam, I fear I am still in a dream.—My brother has for many years been abroad; nor did I ever hear, by the most distant hint, that he thought as yet of returning to England.—I am doubtful, continued she, you still mistake me; I cannot surely be so happy as to be the person you mean.—Indeed you are the very same;—I am well convinced you are Mr. Padstow's sister; and am now surprised, that I did not long before make the discovery, as I this moment behold a striking likeness between you; therefore I will instantly acquaint Miss Knightly with it, who will soon communicate the happy news to your brother.—So saying, away I tripped

tripped to make you partaker of my joy.—She stepped after me, desiring, as that letter concerned her, that she may peruse it in my absence.—I begged her to have a moment's patience, and I would return to her again.

I was unwilling, my Lavinia, she should see how deeply her brother was affected at the thoughts of losing her, fearing it would increase the depression her gentle spirits already suffered.

Immediately on my return, she again entreated me to look at your letter, as she still seemed doubtful I had mistaken her for another; therefore to convince her, I was constrained to read that part of it which concerns her; when, starting from her seat, and running towards me, with the utmost delight, Yes, it is, it is my brother.—Ah!—what unutterable pleasure do I feel, that I am so near him?—And is it possible that I shall once more behold him?—But then, what must he think of me?—Shall I not suffer

fer greatly in his opinion, by leaving my cousin Blane so clandestinely?—She looked tenderly on me, saying, Ah! Madam, what thanks are due to you?—How shall I bless the day I became acquainted with you? though I was used extremely ill by that vile ruffian I met in the field.—My brother, I dare say, will endeavour to find him out, and be revenged on him.

But there is another that has insulted me still more than he; but I will avoid, if possible, my brother's knowing it, lest he should throw himself into danger: yet, if he is not acquainted with it, what will he think of me?—Perhaps he will suspect me to be worse than I really am.—I am much perplexed, and know not how to act.—God preserve my brother! I hope he will never suffer by my imprudence.—Appearances are strongly against me; yet I am not so criminal as the world may imagine me to be: but how wrong is it for young women

women to engage in private marriages !
 —O ! Miss Somerset, I shall always
 have reason highly to condemn it.—
 What distresses have I not been exposed
 to, by taking this inconsiderate step !
 though with the only man I could ever
 like ; nor will I, for his sake, ever think
 of another :—No, these sables (pointing
 to a bombazeen sack she had on) shall
 never be changed for a different coloured
 garb.—But I shall tire you, Madam,
 —I hardly know what I say.—She hid
 her lovely face in my bosom, saying, Oh !
 my head ! I fear it is at times disordered.
 —I begged her to lie down and com-
 pose herself ; which she agreed to ; and
 before I left her, I took an opportunity
 of desiring her not to hint the name of
 Padstow to my aunt, or Lady Moss, well
 knowing, my Lavinia, it is a sound that
 would be no ways agreeable to them.

I am really touched with her moving
 behaviour, though I am yet a stranger
 to her real history, which appears to me
 very

very mysterious, as I have not learned to whom she was married, or by what means she escaped from her cousin Blane, nor do I know how she came to be settled in Mrs. Stapleton's family. There must certainly be a particular Providence over her to meet with such valuable people as they proved to be ; or to what innumerable dangers might not so lovely a young creature have been exposed ?—I am so much concerned at hearing her misfortunes, that I have not had time to mention my own ; though I assure you, my Lavinia, I am still very unhappy ; for the vile Foxchace is now here. He came last night, and still persists in the same odious strain. At his first entrance he found me alone in the parlour, on which he snapped his fingers, and hummed a fox-hunting song for joy ; then said, he thought himself very fortunate to have this agreeable opportunity of entertaining me alone, promising

mising, he would be very careful not to offend.

For some time he behaved with more gentleness than I thought it was in his power to do; but, on my answering him in a manner not quite agreeable to him, he was in a moment off his guard, and again fell into his usual unmannerly stile, which terrified me beyond expression.

Ah! my friend, what can I do, beset, as I am, on all sides?—My sister, and Sir Peter Obrian-Rueful too are expected here every day.—I shudder at the thought.—I had almost forgot to tell you Mr. Lucas is indisposed; he has not been here for three or four days.—My aunt and Lady Moss appear much concerned at it.

Mr. Heartfree is quite recovered, and set out this morning in pursuit of the run-aways.—Lady Moss seems better reconciled to her fate, than I ever expected.—But how trifling, my friend, is all this!—Have I not too long delay-
ed

ed telling you the concern I am under, at the unkind behaviour of your brother?—Indeed I have no patience with him. Ah! my Lavinia, how unworthy is he of such a mother and sister!

I think I hear some one coming; but before I conclude, let me entreat you, if possible, to prevent Mr. Padstow from visiting M. Castle.—He must for some time content himself with hearing, that the dear Maria is in safe hands, otherwise I fear it will be attended with a world of difficulties to your unfortunate

MELIORA SOMERSET.

LETTER XIV.

Miss SOMERSET in Continuation.

M. Castle.

I AM this moment returned from visiting the unhappy Mrs. H. which I find is now the name of the once Miss Padstow.

Padstow.—O ! my friend, I have scarcely spirits to relate her sufferings.—I am overwhelmed with grief at hearing them.—What dreadful dangers has she been in !—Her brother, I think, must not know it whilst in his weak condition.—She has, so far, my Lavinia, providentially escaped from the deep laid schemes which were formed for her destruction.—But let me not anticipate.—I will therefore proceed to tell you her mournful history, in her own words, as near as I can remember.

On my first entering her apartment, she politely arose and handed me to a chair ; then, seating herself by me, said :

All this morning, Miss Somerset, I have been endeavouring to compose myself, so as to be able to recite to you my unhappy story, which, I hope, I shall now perform with less difficulty than I could yesterday.

Know then, Madam, continued she, that for many years after I was placed
in

in the nunnery, nothing remarkable happened ; my life was one continued calm. —My brother was then not far from me, so that I frequently saw him, and scarcely had a thought that I concealed from him ; a trust which he always encouraged, by placing a confidence in me by way of return. I was likewise in great favour with Lady Abbess, consequently had the honour of conversing very often with her ; and was at no time so strictly confined as those who have exchanged their liberty for the veil.

I was so much pleased with my situation, that I often thought of staying in it for life, and sometimes hinted this to Lady Abbess, who failed not greatly to commend me for it.

I had soon after an opportunity of seeing my brother, and made him acquainted with my intention, who could by no means think favourably of it, and used many arguments to dissuade me from such a resolution.

I listen-

I listened very attentively to all he said; particularly, when he came to speak of the great change I must undergo, with regard to my religion, which I had not properly considered of, having been taught by my cousin Blane, and Lady Abbess (who were both violently bigotted to the Roman Catholic religion) that theirs alone was the true faith, and that no salvation could possibly be expected for any that did not die in their communion.

My brother plainly discovered the false notions I had imbibed, and did every thing in his power to prevent my continuing in them; he failed not, on these occasions, to make use of such clear arguments as soon convinced me how much I had been misled.

Lady Abbess, all this time, flattered herself with the hope, that I should one day take the veil; and from this opinion, she indulged me with many liberties that were denied to most of the others.—I had

now

now often an opportunity of conversing with my brother alone, when he never failed to instil into me such religious notions as he most approved of. And I have often regretted, that I had not begun earlier to discourse with him on this subject.—However, my inclination for the veil soon wore off; though I had not yet hinted so much to Lady Abbess, who often told me she should rejoice to make a convert of me.—My cousin Blane frequently visited me, and always joined with Lady Abbess, in applauding my pious resolution, as they used to term it.

I had not courage enough to tell them of the different sentiments I had now formed, though I one day ventured to point out some few things which I objected to, in their mode of worship; on which they both appeared greatly displeased; particularly my cousin Blane, who told me, with more anger than I ever heard her speak before, that if I did

did not alter my opinion in a few days, she would desire Lady Abbess's permission to take me home to her house; when she hoped to make use of such arguments, as would entirely convince me I had been in an error, and totally refuse every objection that I could possibly make to any ceremony they made use of on these solemn occasions.

Having said this she left me; I accompanied her to the grate, where stood a number of strangers, whom curiosity continually brought to our convent.—I observed a young gentleman among the rest, who seemed to eye me with a particular attention; his looks indicated the goodness of his heart; I think I never till that moment saw a figure so engaging.—He drew towards the grate, and whispered something I could not distinctly hear; however I was afraid other ears might have been quicker than mine, which obliged me to retire precipitately.

For two whole days I thought on nothing but this handsome stranger, nor did I ever wish for any thing so ardently, as to see him once more;—sometimes I was extremely angry with myself for indulging so foolish a desire;—then I fancied he might have been a person that knew me, and had some intelligence to communicate to me, or, for what other reason thought I, should he look at me in so earnest a manner?—In this way did I reflect for some time. One day, however, going towards the grate, I had the satisfaction of seeing him again, and was immediately seized with such a tremor, that I could scarcely stand, and it was with the utmost difficulty that I retired; I was never before so angry with myself.—What a charming opportunity, thought I, have I now let slip, of hearing what he had to say, being then quite alone!—I blamed my folly a thousand times, though I could not account for the manner in which I on
a sud-

a sudden found myself, having before been taken notice of by strangers in a more particular way than now, though I never regarded it, otherwise than by instantly discovering it to Lady Abbess, which served to increase the confidence she already placed in me; and her opinion of my prudence was so great, that I was often set as a kind of governess over the rest of my unveiled sisters;—but I was very unworthy of such a trust, for I now no longer wished for confinement; but, on the contrary, desired nothing so much as being at liberty, which I never before thought of. During this time my brother visited me, and could not help observing the change which now appeared in my behaviour.—I was on a sudden grown reserved and peevish; and, though I did not perceive it myself, it was visible to every body else.—Lady Abbess was kind enough to impute it to the struggle I felt at the thoughts of parting forever with my liberty,

berty, therefore would sit down with me an hour or two together, endeavouring to reason me out of those heretical scruples, as she had termed the doubts I had mentioned to her in a former conversation; but I had no relish for discourse like this; my whole thoughts being entirely employed on a different subject.

Discoursing with me one day very seriously, we chanced to walk towards the grate, where I again beheld the agreeable stranger.—As soon as he perceived me, a very visible joy sparkled in his eyes.

At this instant a person desired to speak with Lady Abbess, in the next room.—I trembled much, and would have accompanied her, but the desire I had of satisfying my eyes with one glance more on the attractive object, prevented my following her.—I caught his eyes fixed stedfastly on mine;—I was sadly confounded, and was about to retire, when he came towards the grate, addressing

me most politely, and slipping a note at the same time within the grate, which I for some time refused to accept, nor should I have been prevailed on at last to take it, had I not heard some one coming, which proved to be no other than Lady Abbess, therefore I was obliged to snatch it up in great haste, or she must have seen it.

I was now very eager to examine the contents of it, and instantly repairing to my room, was soon satisfied of what I so much wished to hear.—The next day he came with another billet couched in the most tender expressions of everlasting regard.

My cousin Blane shortly after visited me, and desired to know what my sentiments now were on the subject of our last discourse.—I again assured her, and with some degree of *boldness* too, (I thought the *matter* required it) that I could by no means reconcile myself to the te-

nets I had before objected to, particularly the doctrine of transubstantiation, the infallibility of the Pope, and their vain adoration of saints.—On hearing this, she became quite angry, and insisted on my going home with her; telling Lady Abbess, that, with her permission, she would return with me again, as soon as she could root out of my mind the idle irreligious notions I had so foolishly conceived.

After taking a tender leave of all my companions, I quitted the convent, tho' I imagined it would be but for a short time.—My cousin Blane spared no pains in endeavouring to bring me to her way of thinking; but my brother's arguments had such an effect on me, and had taken such deep root in my mind, that it was out of the power of the most eloquent tongue to prevail with me to alter my opinion. I refused to read her books, or listen to her infatuated priests,
by

by which I greatly incurred her displeasure.

Mr. H. which is the name of the gentleman I have before been speaking of, soon found out the change of my situation, and I had now more frequent opportunities of seeing him, and if I was at first taken with his person, I was afterwards much more charmed with his understanding. His conversation was delightful and improving, beyond what I ever met with; he was polite, sensible and learned, and could argue on any subject.—His sentiments too were so refined and honourable, that few I believe ever equalled him; none surpassed him.

The greatest trouble I now had, was, in what manner I should acquaint my cousin Blane with it.—I feared she would greatly object to it, as it would at once put an end to all her hopes of my taking the veil.

I often received letters from Mr. H. though it was a long time before I could think of answering them. Yet the strong solicitations, and the fresh assurances of his sincerity, at last prevailed; and I no longer hesitated to acquaint him with all that concerned me.—I assured him my fortune was trifling, nor had I any expectations of having an addition to it from my relations.

He answered this letter immediately, and desired me to make myself easy, telling me, the consideration of a fortune was what had never yet occurred to him, nor should he ever think of enquiring into it, as he hoped he had sufficient for us both; and earnestly entreated me that I would make my friends acquainted with the sincere regard he had for me, and ardently assured me he had no views, but what were strictly honourable.—This I never doubted, and was hastening down to discover the whole to my cousin Blane, when I was told she
was

was engaged with company.—I cannot say I was much disappointed, having scarcely summoned resolution enough to tell her how clandestinely I had for some time acted.

I was again retiring to my apartment, elated with the most pleasing prospects, when I saw Mr. H. at a distance, deeply conferring with faithful Betty, an honest domestic of my cousin Blane's, who was no stranger to all that had passed between us, it being through her means I received his letters.

An acquaintance at that instant unfortunately came in, which hindered my speaking to him;—however he observed me, and looking dejectedly, made signs as if some dreadful disaster had befallen him.—Alas! how was I alarmed at this sudden alteration! and more so, when Betty brought me the melancholy news which he had just before received from England, that his mother was extremely ill, and given over by her

physicians, yet she earnestly desired, if possible, to see her son.---Therefore he entreated me to consent to be his wife, before his departure, which was to be the next morning; but begged me to be secret in the affair, lest it should reach the ears of his mother, telling me, should that be the case, and she not approve of it, she might then act much to his disadvantage, as a great part of the family estate was left solely at her disposal.

Thunderstruck at this intelligence, I was incapable of forming any resolution.---In my first surprise, I was going down to communicate the whole affair to my cousin Blane; but I stopped myself by the way, and considered, that I should by that means lose Mr. H. forever, a thought which was insupportable.

Never I believe was a person in a more distressed situation.---I could find no possibility of acquainting my brother with

with it, as I knew not where he was, nor have I seen him since.

Mr. H. spoke of the indisposition of his mother with great concern, duty and affection,

My regard for him was greater than I can express, and I had the highest opinion of his honour; yet I could not help trembling at the thoughts of agreeing to a private marriage.---And after revolving in my mind, as well as the hurry of spirits I was then in would permit, so many difficulties occurred to my imagination, as made it impossible for me to comply with such an imprudent scheme.---I therefore at once came to a resolution of acquainting my cousin Blane with the whole affair.---For this purpose I quitted my apartment, and was going, trembling, down stairs, when I heard a female voice call in a whispering tone, Miss Padstow!---On my looking round I saw it was Betty, with another Letter, which I refused taking,

till I had told my cousin Blane all my proceedings, as I feared, should I first indulge myself with reading it, I might be disarmed from my purpose.

The poor girl was startled with my intention, and represented to me, with tears in her eyes, the inconveniency that would now attend it, should her lady, at this time, be acquainted with Mr. H.'s passion for me, saying, she doubted not but she would be so exasperated at finding I did not intend taking the veil, that she would, in the first sallies of her passion, make his mother acquainted with all his transactions.---This consideration at once prevented me from seeking my cousin Blane.

I instantly consented to read his letter, which contained such tender expressions, and such noble, generous, and disinterested sentiments, that I could no longer hesitate how to act, but, imprudent as I must appear, was resolved to purchase his, and my own peace, at
the

the expence of a private marriage.---
But, alas! how was I in this mistaken!

Here, my Lavinia, she wept---but recovering herself, she said, that Betty observing the disposition I was now in to favour Mr. H. soon hurried away with the happy tidings, as she called them, and instantly returned again to me with a countenance full of joy, at relating the pleasure she had given him, though he was much averse to a private wedding, and sincerely wished it was consistent with his circumstances to make it public.---The reason of his first desiring me to make my friends acquainted with it, was, from a presumption that his mother might live many years, and in time be brought to think favourably of it;---but he had since altered his opinion, and would by no means give her the least intimation of the matter, imagining it would occasion her great uneasiness; and fearing likewise, that, was she now to know it, she might, in the height of her

her passion, be tempted to make such an alteration in her will, as might prejudice his fortune forever.

I never passed a day in more anxiety than this.---Betty had taken care to conduct every thing with the utmost secrecy, having the entire management of the whole scheme; and accordingly, the next morning at three o'clock, she contrived to let Mr. H. into the house, attended by a venerable clergyman, a distant relation of hers, who performed the solemn ceremony with the greatest privacy; after which they again retired, though Mr. H. first very tenderly entreated me to make myself easy, assuring me, he would let slip no opportunity, which he hoped would be frequent; and that I should receive his letters safely, through the kind assistance of honest Betty; and told me too, that as soon as he had discharged his duty to his mother, he would instantly return, and joyfully acknowledge me to be his wife. After
his

his departure, I immediately retired to my apartment, and throwing myself on the bed, gave a loose to those sighs and tears, which in his presence I had carefully endeavoured to conceal.

In this condition I remained, till roused by a summons to breakfast ;---however, I begged to be excused going down, as I really found myself much indisposed. At hearing this my cousin Blane visited me, and expressed great concern at the alteration she perceived in my countenance.-- -But, Ah ! Madam, what remorse did I not feel at seeing her ! Every affectionate expression she made use of, wounded me more than the most poignant, bitter reproaches could possibly have done.

I now looked on myself as unworthy of her friendship, and was on the point of throwing myself at her feet, and declare the deceit I had practised ;---but the inconceivable regard I had for Mr. H.
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the best of men too, put a stop to my purpose.

Here, my Lavinia, the charming girl seemed greatly fatigued, and was obliged to be silent for some time, in order to recover herself.—I must follow her example.

Your affectionate

MELIORA SOMERSET.

LETTER XV.

Miss SOMERSET in Continuation.

M. Castle.

I NOW proceed nearly in Mrs. H.'s words, but shall omit the particulars of her indisposition, which happened on Mr. H.'s departure. During this, her cousin Blane behaved with the utmost tenderness, and made her, if possible, appear more ungrateful in her own eyes than

than before. However, she luckily received a letter from Mr. H. before his arrival in England, filled with repeated assurances of his sincerity, and everlasting regard, which was a reviving cordial to her drooping spirits.

Nothing remarkable happened till she received another letter from him, dated from Red-Lion-Square, London. This, Miss Somerset, continued the lovely speaker, contained an account of his mother's being much better than he expected to find her; at which he expressed a great deal of joy, telling me, as soon as her health was re-established, he intended to acquaint her with our marriage, and hoped she would not then disapprove of it. Therefore he enlarged on the great pleasure and felicity he should enjoy, in being permitted publicly to own me for his wife.—He said so much on this subject, that I no longer repented of what I had done; but, on the contrary, amused myself with a thousand agreeable reflexions,

flexions,---such as my returning to England, and being happy in the conversation of Mr. H.--My brother too, I supposed, would be much pleased at my meeting with so worthy a man, and not blame me for engaging in a private marriage, when he knew my motives for so doing.

With these, and many other flattering hopes, did I often indulge myself;---But, alas! Madam, how trifling, how transitory, was my joy! My happiness proved ideal only, and I awoke to real anxiety, and dreadful perturbations.

This I soon experienced on receiving a third letter, which was brought as usual by Betty.---But, good God! how can I describe the shock I felt, at his telling me he had acquainted his mother with our marriage, on which she was so much exasperated with him, that she had forbid him her presence for ever, and was determined to disinherit him as far as lay in her power!---But this did not cause him
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so much uneasiness, as her displeasure; observing again, that he had a genteel independent fortune :---notwithstanding, he more earnestly than ever desired I would still be secret, and told me, he had very particular reasons for requesting me to act with this caution; adding, he was then at a friend's house, about twenty miles distant, where he entreated me to visit him, and used every tender argument to prevail on me to come to him privately, which might be easily accomplished by the assistance of Betty, who would safely conduct me to the place of his retreat; adding likewise, that nothing should have prevented his waiting on me himself, but a most dreadful pain he had in his side, occasioned, as he supposed, by the great anxiety which he had suffered on my account; and feared, that, if he did not see me soon, the consequence might be fatal.

O! Madam, to what a deplorable situation was I again reduced!--Ten thousand

land times did I wish I had never been born, and as often repented of my own rash folly in acting as I had done.---But when I reflected on his illness, and represented to myself how much he stood in need of my tender care and assistance, I was, without any further consideration, ready to fly to him.---Yet how dreadful was the thought of leaving my cousin Blane so clandestinely !

I trembled too at fearing I should forfeit the good opinion of my brother, by this imprudent step ;---but this consideration was over-balanced, by the thoughts of what Mr. H. had suffered for me, by losing the affections of a parent, whom he had all his life-time highly honoured.---How ungrateful, and undutiful then must I appear, not to risk some displeasure to serve him, who had now the greatest right to demand my attendance !---He is, thought I, my true and lawful husband ; and dare I one moment dispute his orders ?---No.

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Without further deliberation I communicated my hasty thoughts to Betty, who applauded my resolution, and told me the messenger then waited for my answer, and desired I would be as expeditious as possible, as there was no time to be lost.

She likewise assured me, she would do every thing in her power to contribute to my escape, and forgot not to enlarge on the indispensable duty I was under, of complying with the request of Mr. H. saying, it was incumbent on me, now, to do all I could to promote his happiness.

This way of reasoning was too agreeable to my inclinations not to be complied with. I therefore writ him a dutiful letter, assuring him, I would be ready at the appointed time. I committed it to the care of Betty, who sent it away directly, fearing, as she afterwards told me, I should recall it. Had that been the case, how fortunate should I have then

then been!----What an artful villain should I then have escaped!

I am well assured Mr. H. would never have sent for me, had he known into what hands he had fallen; but he, good man, was ignorant of the whole affair.

The next night, by the assistance of Betty, I quitted my cousin Blane's house, and was soon after accosted by a well-dressed man, who very civilly told me, he was come to conduct me to Mr. H. who was too much indisposed to venture out himself, though he most ardently longed to see me;---so saying, he took my hand, and led me towards a coach that waited at some distance.

As the moon shone very bright, I was enabled to see a lady coming to meet us whom he introduced to me as his wife, saying, he thought it would be agreeable to me to have one of my own sex on the road, and had therefore prevailed on her to accompany him.---I thanked

ed him for this kind consideration, and, after taking a hasty, but tender leave of Betty, stepped into the coach : they immediately followed me, and seemed greatly rejoiced, that every thing had been so quietly conducted ; however, I attended very little to what they said, being exceedingly impatient to enquire particularly after Mr. H.-- But their answers were by no means satisfactory, and, instead of alleviating, served rather to increase my affliction ; which they observing, begged I would make myself easy, assuring me, that nothing should, on their part, be wanting, to contribute to my happiness : and telling me too, that they had known Mr. H. from a child, and had therefore ever regarded him with the highest affection.

From this kind of discourse I begun to find myself somewhat more easy.--- But, alas ! Madam, how easily was I imposed upon !---I had never yet seen any thing of the world, having been, the
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greatest part of my life, immured in a convent, and only conversant with a few, most of whom were as ignorant as myself; so that I was totally unexperienced in the wicked arts, and vile seducing stratagems too often practised, and thought it was impossible for any people to act so basely as I found afterwards these did.---They took the most effectual method of ingratiating themselves with me, by speaking so highly in favour of Mr. H. though I am now well convinced it was all dissimulation.

We drove at an amazing rate, and soon arrived at an old-fashioned lone house, where we were instantly admitted, and preparations made for our refreshment.

I was half dead with fatigue of body and mind; nor could I partake of any thing they offered me, but pressing-ly desired I might see Mr. H. on which Mr. and Mrs. Waldron (I find this was their name) told me they would first go
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and gradually acquaint him with my arrival.---Accordingly they left the room, but soon returned, saying, he was in a sound sleep, and therefore thought it not advisable to disturb him; then observing how much I was fatigued, Mrs. Waldron advised me to lie down for a few hours, saying, Mr. H. may perhaps then awake, and my spirits would be better able to support me at seeing the alteration I must expect to find in him; being (she was sorry to say it) emaciated almost to a skeleton.—God forbid! replied I, dreadfully shocked at this melancholy intelligence.---She attended me to my apartment, and, after covering me up, desired me to be composed, and then retired.

I know not how to describe the manner in which I found myself.---The account she had given me of Mr. H. had rendered me insensible to every thing, and I remained like one stupefied.

I at last fancied I heard the voice of Mr. H. calling me, therefore, starting from the bed, I instantly quitted my apartment—but, alas! when I got into the gallery, I knew not where to find him: I tried all the doors, but they were locked.

Mrs. Waldron now came up stairs;—she seemed much surprised, when she saw me;—I told her I thought I had heard the voice of Mr. H. and could no longer refrain from seeing him.—You shall, Madam, replied she; but promise first, you will behave with fortitude, as I much fear you will not see him many times more. It was impossible to support this;—I was incapable of answering her, and sunk down on the floor.—How long I remained in this senseless situation, I know not; when I came to myself, I discovered many gathered round me, and heard Mr. Waldron angrily speak to his wife, for acquainting me of Mr. H.'s danger so abruptly;—she declared

clared it had escaped her unawares, and that she should never forgive herself for being so unguarded.

Another fit succeeded this, which I believe continued much longer; and in this unhappy way did I continue the greatest part of the day.---The few intervals of reason I had, were employed on calling upon Mr. H. and entreating them to remove me to him, which they promised to do, if I would be a little more composed---I will indeed, I replied, scarcely knowing what I said; I will be every thing you will have me, if you will let me see him.

I fixed my eyes on Mrs. Waldron, saying, Ah! Madam, what a deplorable situation is mine?---May you never experience what I now suffer.----She looked stedfastly at me, the tears streaming down her cheeks, but I soon found them to be of the crocodile kind.

I spent the night more wretchedly than can be imagined. The next morn-

ing I found myself extremely weak and low, when doctor Longman, a physician, who happened then to be in the house, prescribed something which procured me some repose.---After this I found myself something better, and desired I might get up, and see Mr. H. which Mrs. Waldron consented to, and as soon as I was dressed, she led me to his apartment.---But, O ! Miss Somerset, how can I describe what I suffered at finding him speechless ?---The room was so darkned I could not see his face.---I took hold of his hand, which seemed to be covered with a deathly clam.---I asked him if he knew me ? when I imagined he did, by his endeavouring to press my hand to his lips.---I could not bear this moving scene, though, alas ! I was reserved for scenes of still greater horror.

I sunk, motionless, by his side, and continued in this manner for some time. On my recovering myself a little, I perceived a gentleman sitting by his bedside,

side, who seemed quite overwhelmed with grief, but I afterwards found this was only a vile pretence to cover his specious villainy.

Mrs. Waldron observing how much I was affected, entreated me to leave the room, telling me, that I only added to Mr. H.'s disorder, by remaining there, and taking my hand, she forcibly tore me from him.

On entering my own apartment, she seemed to be very assiduous in her endeavours to comfort me, but all her arguments were ineffectual.---I was incapable of listening to any thing she said.

I found myself extremely ill, and indulged the pleasing thought of not long surviving Mr. H.

I was not afterwards, continued she, permitted to see Mr. H. but immediately put to bed, out of which I did not rise during many ensuing days.---I was the greatest part of that time delirious, frequently, as they afterwards told me,

calling on Mr. H. and desiring I might go to him; but, alas! it was now too late, for he expired the same day I left him, though I was not made acquainted with it, till I was almost recovered. And then, Mr. Fenton, which is the name of the young gentleman, that sat by Mr. H.'s bed-side, and appeared so greatly affected at his illness, told me of it in the most gentle manner imaginable, and though it was no more than what I expected to hear, yet it was almost too much for me.---I remained in a very weak unhappy state for a long time, during which Mr. and Mrs. Waldron, and Mr. Fenton, used all possible means to amuse and divert my melancholy, and I should have thought myself very ungrateful, had I at this time suspected them of insincerity.

As soon as I was able to leave my apartment, Dr. Longman ordered me every day to take an airing, which I did.---Mrs. Waldron and Mr. Fenton always accom-

accompanied me. One morning we were going out as usual, when Mrs. Waldron received a letter, which she said required an immediate answer, therefore desired I would excuse her, as Mr. Fenton would attend me ;---but not much approving of this, I begged she would permit me to stay at home, assuring her, at that time, I should greatly prefer it ;---however, she would not attend to any excuse I could make, telling me, it would be wrong to let slip so fine a morning, since my health was so much amended by this kind of exercise.

Mr. Fenton looked much displeased, at imagining I should object to going alone with him, having then no reason for so doing, as he had always hitherto behaved with the utmost civility and good manners, nay, more like a brother than otherwise, and seemed to pay the greatest respect to the memory of Mr. H. having put himself into close mourning.---But, alas ! my friend, how are

we deceived by outward appearances! ---What a hypocritical garb was this to him! O! Miss Somerset, I had all along been deceived, by his smooth insinuating behaviour.

At length, by the earnest persuasion of Mrs. Waldron, I consented to go in the coach with him alone, and, for some time, he gave me no cause to repent it, as he talked in his usual friendly way, nor had I then the least suspicion of his being otherwise than he appeared.---Therefore judge my surprize, Madam, when I observed him look stedfastly on me, and grasping my hand, he pressed it to his lips.---However I tore it from him with an air of disdain, but this did not prevent him from going on in a strain that was odious to me.---I cannot pretend to recount all that passed, therefore let it suffice to acquaint you, he made me an offer of marriage, and failed not to say every thing that he thought most likely to prevail with me.---But ah! Madam,

Madam, how shocking was such a proposal to me! I insisted on hearing no more of it, assuring him, that the whole world should never prevail on me to bestow my hand a second time.

I was accordingly displeased at this unexpected declaration, and would not listen to a word he had to say more, till he roused my attention, by hinting how much I was in his power.---And would you, Sir, replied I, be mean enough to take advantages of the distressed?---Most certainly, Madam, when my own happiness, nay, my life, is at stake. Yes, it all depends on you; give me but this, (snatching hold of my hand) and I shall be blessed, beyond description blessed.---In this manner did he run on for a long time.---I was greatly terrified at what he had said, and the thought alone softened my behaviour to him, till we had finished our usual course of airing.

On my alighting from the coach, I was met by Mrs. Waldron; she pretend-

ed to be surpris'd at my disorder'd looks, though I doubt not, but she was well acquainted with the cause. I flew immediately to my apartment, and locked the door; then, throwing myself into a chair, gave way to many disagreeable reflexions.— Often did I ask myself this question, have I not deserved this treatment by so cruelly deceiving my brother, and cousin Blane?

At length I was disturb'd from this way of reasoning, by the voice of Mrs. Waldron, who desired admittance.—I arose and let her in, on which she again repeated, how much she was concern'd at the disorder I appear'd in. I related to her all that had pass'd.—She look'd on me with much astonishment, saying, is this all, Madam, that you was so frightened at? All! Mrs. Waldron, repeated I; you surprise me much, by making so light of it: pray, had I not sufficient reason to be terrified?—Ah! Madam, replied she, I wish it was otherwise.

wife.---I don't know a more deserving man than Mr. Fenton is.---I am sure he means nothing but honour.---God forbid he should, Mrs. Waldron, but let him mean what he will. I have firmly promised never to forget the vows I made to Mr. H. I was entirely his, nor will I ever be another's.

It is certainly wrong, Madam, replied Mrs. Waldron, to make rash promises, as no one can at all times answer for themselves;---but I never look on it as any crime to break those promises which are made in a hurry.---Let me therefore entreat you, to consider of what Mr. Fenton has said.---Consider yourself too, Madam, in the bloom of life.

Hold, Mrs. Waldron, said I, your arguments by no means suit me;---nor will I ever more listen to them.---And let me tell you too, my promises were not made in a hurry.

This she received with a laugh, but I was downright angry, on which she

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retired, muttering something I did not understand.—I was very much surprised at her behaviour, and plainly discovered she was wholly in the interest of Mr. Fenton.

Mr. Fenton for some time endeavoured to gain my affections, by the most soothing behaviour, but finding that would not do, he had recourse to the vilest stratagems, and one day brought in a clergyman, declaring he should perform the ceremony at all events, if I did not instantly comply.---I ran towards Mr. and Mrs. Waldron, beseeching them to befriend me; but they both looked as his dependants, fearing to speak, lest they should offend him.

At length, by my earnest tears and entreaties, the clergyman was dismissed; but I was alarmed, and meditated an escape from this detested habitation. Mr. Fenton left no means untried to gain his purpose; but finding them ineffectual, he at last concealed himself in my bedchamber,

ber, where I retired at my usual hour, and, after locking the door, took up a book, with which I amused myself some time, then laid it aside, and gave way to many uneasy reflexions.—After a long time spent in useless disquiet, I began to undress myself, and going to the closet to hang up my gown, I perceived something shine on the floor, when stooping down to see what it was, I perceived a man's foot, which made me give a violent shriek, and instantly Mr. Fenton appeared from behind a heap of gowns, saying, with a loud laugh, Ha! have I frightened you?— I could not immediately recover myself, so as to answer him; and when I did, the hurry I was in caused a great hesitation in my speech; so that, I believe, he did not hear distinctly what I said, nor can I myself now recollect it, though I am sure it was every thing that was affronting, having lost all patience.

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He at first endeavoured to soften me, by affirming he meant nothing but honour, and again pressed me to marry him.

I could not disguise my sentiments.--- I hated his proposal, and could not help telling him so; on which his eyes grew large, and sparkled with indignation.--- He flew towards me with great eagerness, saying, You are now in my power, and must take the consequence of your perverseness.---On this, he proceeded to liberties, that shocked my very soul.--- I stormed and raved like a mad woman; ---but, alas! it was a long time before any one came to my assistance.---I often called on Mr. and Mrs. Waldron, but they seemed deaf to my cries.---At last, when almost spent with the resistance I had made, I heard a voice at the door, enquiring what was the matter.---I then redoubled my cries, entreating them, if they had the least degree of humanity, to break down the door, and come to the
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the assistance of an unfortunate creature, who was at the brink of ruin.

Mr. Fenton all this while endeavoured to stop my mouth, swearing dreadful oaths, that he would be the death of the first person that should dare to enter the room; but the good doctor Longman was not to be terrified at these menaces;—for it was happily, him who burst open the door, and came to my assistance.

O! Madam, what a happy moment was this! He appeared to me as my guardian angel.—I ran to him, fell on my knees, bathing his hand with my tears.—He seemed much affected, and turned from me in order to conceal it.

The wicked Fenton was in such a passion, that he now alarmed the whole house, swearing he would be revenged on Dr. Longman, and wondering how the devil he came there.

The doctor replied, with much composure, that the butler's wife was that night.

night taken exceedingly ill, and had greatly alarmed her husband, who had come to beg his assistance; but, continued he to Mr. Fenton, gentle means are most suitable to the fair; leave this lady to me, I'll try what persuasions can do.—This was spoken in a kind of whisper, but loud enough for me to hear him, which made me tremble lest he should be in league with the rest.

Mr. Fenton still continued in a dreadful passion, and told the doctor it would never be in his power to make him sufficient amends for this night's intrusion, and then left the room.

Mr. and Mrs. Waldron then made their appearance, rubbing their eyes and yawning, as if they had just been disturbed from a sound sleep.

I again implored their aid; but, alas! I found, I was applying to the wrong quarter: for when I told Mrs. Waldron, the dangerous situation I had been in, she only made a pho! at it, saying,
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it was my own fault, not did she blame Mr. Fenton for acting as he had done, as she thought he had already too much patience.

Good God ! Madam, exclaimed I, in the utmost surprise, do I live to hear one of my own sex talk in this unbecoming strain ?—Are these your real sentiments, Mrs. Waldron ?—If so, where shall I find protection ?—I could say no more, but fell motionless at her feet.

As soon as I came to myself, I saw them all round me, making use of various methods to restore me to my reason.

I endeavoured to stand up, but was too weak to support myself.—Doctor Longman ordered that I should be put to bed, which I highly objected to, but he insisted on it so peremptorily that I at length complied.—Every person but Mrs. Waldron quitted the room.—She assisted in undressing me, and I made use of every argument to soften her heart ; but it was flinty.

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As soon as I was in bed, Doctor Longman came to me. I told him that I was exceedingly unhappy.—He then advised Mrs. Waldron to go to bed, telling her, he would sit with me for an hour, as I appeared in some danger.—She looked mistrustful, and at first refused to go.—At length growing very sleepy, she nodded three or four times in her chair, till she had like to have fallen out of it.—Doctor Longman again desired her to retire, which she at last consented to.

As soon as she was gone, he gave me the comfortable assurances of his being entirely in my interest, telling me, he would do every thing in his power to serve me, and that what he had said to Mr. Fenton, was only to save appearances, knowing there was no other method of preserving me from the ruin which threatened me, but by acting the detestable character of a hypocrite, and pretending to side with them. I begged him

him to contrive some method for my escape.

He had not time to answer me, before Mrs. Waldron returned, saying, she could not go to bed in peace; and was determined to remain with me.—On hearing this, the doctor took his leave, desiring, if I found myself worse, that he might instantly be called.

Mrs. Waldron staid with me till the morning, when Mr. Fenton entered my apartment, enquiring in a tender affectionate tone after my health.—I was much terrified at seeing him, therefore could only stammer out, inarticulately, Pray, Sir, leave me! Doctor Longman entered the room just at that instant, pretending to be very angry with me for giving myself such airs.

He then, in a whisper, desired Mr. Fenton to retire, and told him that he would try what effect his arguments would have on me: he obeyed, but left Mrs. Waldron behind, to give him an
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account of our conversation.—The Doctor knowing this, and willing to blind them still farther, launched out greatly in the praise of Mr. Fenton, and blamed me for my stubborn behaviour.

I knew his motives for acting in this manner, therefore listened to his conversation very patiently, which gave them some room to think, that I should, thro' his means, in time be brought to comply with the proposals that had been made me.

I could not often help wondering, how this good man could find so many arguments in support of a subject which I knew in his heart he detested:—but it was owing to this happy stratagem that I am now preserved from the impending ruin that then threatened me.—For by this method he had worked himself so entirely into their confidence, that they now consulted him on all occasions, though Fenton declared, that if I did not very soon consent to be
his

his wife, he would, without further delay, be revenged on me in a different way.

Mr. and Mrs. Waldron applauded him highly for this resolution; but the Doctor humbly begged they would leave the management of this important affair to him.

They agreed to this proposal, which gave the Doctor an opportunity of projecting the means for my escape.

You must know that doctor Longman lived but a quarter of a mile from the house where I was;—he went home, and, by dint of money, prevailed on some people to come in disguise the next night, and attempt to break open Fenton's house, and gave proper instructions to his own faithful domestics, to place themselves at a small distance, and watch for my coming.

I had kept in my apartment ever since the alarming night that I was so
much

much terrified by Fenton, and pretended to be much worse than I really was.

This I did by the advice of my friend the doctor, who did not forget to give me directions in what manner to prepare for my escape.

At last approached the appointed night, and all the family were retired to their repose, when I got up and dressed myself, then lay down again, trembling, lest I should be discovered in the premeditated attempt.—About two o'clock, punctually to order, I heard some people endeavouring to get into the house.—The family were soon alarmed—great confusion seemed to reign through every part of the house.

Dr. Longman, at that instant, entered my room, with a large great coat under his arm, with which he covered me all over; then, in a whisper, bid me follow him.—I obeyed, and providentially passed undiscovered.

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I no sooner found myself out of the hateful house, than I was received by the Doctor's faithful domestics, and conducted to his delightful habitation, where I remained with great secrecy.—The Doctor came home in two days after, not thinking it prudent to leave Fenton's house sooner, lest his impatience might have given them some suspicion.—He told me, they behaved like mad creatures, on finding I had escaped them, and had dispatched several messengers in search of me;—but the caution he had hitherto observed, had as yet prevented their suspecting him to have any hand in my departure; yet he feared it would be dangerous for me to stay any longer so near them.

I was still greatly distressed, Madam, not knowing where to go. I was ashamed to return to my Cousin Blane; nor did I know where to find my Brother.

The worthy Doctor, observing the dilemma I was in, advised me to return to
England,

England, telling me he had got a relation there, a widow lady, and he doubted not but I might live with her very safely. This proposal was so agreeable to me, that I accepted it with the utmost thankfulness.

Every thing was soon got ready for my departure, and I now took leave of my kind preserver with a heart almost bursting with gratitude.

After I had left him, the remembrance of what I had suffered, and the continual dread I was in, lest I should again be discovered by those wicked abandoned people, kept me very unhappy.

However, I arrived safely in England, and was so fortunate as to be politely and kindly received by Mrs. Stapleton, the lady to whom the Doctor had by letter recommended me ; and with this good woman have I continued ever since, under the borrowed name of Stepney, till my unhappy meeting with that ill-mannered villain in the field.—But I will say no more

more of this, as it was through his means I became acquainted with this most worthy family.

Doctor Longman writ a letter to Mrs. Stapleton some time ago, wherein he says; that Mr. Fenton, after having taken great pains to discover me, and finding it to no purpose, has at last left the neighbourhood, as suddenly and unknown as he came into it; and I find, that he, and his whole family, were entire strangers to every body there; nor can I imagine by what means Mr. H. became acquainted with them.

The doctor likewise adds, he has something to communicate to me, which he fancies will give me pleasure; but I must have patience till he can give me a more particular account of some matters, which, at present, appear very mysterious to him; therefore he concludes with the comfortable assurances of our seeing him in England as soon as he can settle some necessary business; but in the mean time I'm

uncertain how to proceed—for Mr. H. alas ! is no more ! and my brother, I am doubtful, will condemn me.

She reclined her head in silence on my bosom, whilst I begged her to be easy, telling her I would answer for her brother's receiving her with his usual affection.

She looked tenderly on me, saying, O ! you are all goodness, Miss Somerset !

I stopped her, by again assuring her, that I would use my best endeavours to serve her—so saying, I left her somewhat composed.

O ! my friend, I am so deeply affected I can write no more. I need not remind you to do all in your power to comfort her poor brother. How will his manly heart be oppressed when he hears what I have now written !—down drops my pen to give way to a shower of tears, which I hope will yield some relief to the afflicted bosom of your 4 DE 58

MELIORA SOMERSET.

End of the First Volume.

